

MYTH AND LEGEND
IN POST-WAR ENGLISH POETRY.

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To my parents.

SYNOPSIS

The thesis investigates both how and why many of the best post-war poets have moved back to use myth and legend just when they seemed finally discredited.

Chapter One briefly discusses the various scholarly theories of myth, and sharpens the critical terminology to be employed. It describes the personal myth-systems of Yeats, Graves and Lawrence and, conversely, the four systems most generally used by modern poets.

The following four chapters study, in turn, four major approaches to the use of myth in poetry. Chapter² shows how Seamus Heaney's work employs legend as archetype; the history of Ulster being erected as a timeless metaphor to illuminate the present Troubles. Chapter Three takes the poetry of Geoffrey Hill as an example of the development of newly created legend, culminating with that centred on King Offa of Mercia. Chapter Four examines Thom Gunn's use of myth as archetype, showing how the timeless can be given contemporary force, either through existential philosophy or Californian psychedelia. Chapter Five explores Ted Hughes' creation of a new myth, a new reality, the crowning achievement.

Chapter Six discusses why myth is still relevant, distinguishing its careful adoption into four modern stylistic traditions and its four major modes of relevance. Legend is seen as a form of place, myth as a form of time, and the best new poetry is recognised as utilizing both, a surprise invocation of the White Goddess.

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CHAPTER ONE.

MYTH AND POETRY.

'As an art in itself (Poetry) is, first of all, essentially mythological ... It is to the poetry of mythology and not to either science or religion, that we owe that vast obscure cosmic emotion that stirs within us and gives us back the childhood of our race'^I.

'In the dominion of myths we can short circuit the intellect'².

In an early essay, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', T.S.Eliot praised James Joyce for having invented a way, through myth, of creating a 'continuous parallel' between past and present, through which a modern writer (Eliot himself?) can impart 'a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'³.

In the early 1970's, just when such mythologising seemed to be utterly discredited - the 'common myth-kitty' made infamous by Larkin⁴ now apparently sidestepped for chilly reality - four major poems appeared which, though united by little else, used myth or legend to achieve just such 'shape' and 'significance'. Seamus Heaney's North and Geoffrey Hill's Mercian Hymns take native legend to define the poet's own relationship both to the past and his community. Modern problems of fear and dislocation, 'futility and anarchy', are refracted by a local folklore which Heaney rediscovers and Hill reinvents. Similarly, Thom Gunn's Moly and Ted Hughes' Crow take more generalised myth - rediscovered by Gunn, reinvented by Hughes - to explore 'contemporary history' and discern new perceptions, a new sense of violence. How myth and legend again achieved relevance is the subject of this study.

The scholarly investigation of myth is a vastly tangled field, one of little direct relevance to the literary historian. As such a modern 'state of the art' anthology as Pierre Miranda's Mythology⁵ shows, myth has become the preserve of statisticians and psychologists, and yet it remains essentially inexplicable.

'I know very well what it is, provided that nobody asks me: but if I am asked and try to explain, I am baffled'⁶.

The surest path into this quagmire is a short, masterly account by Northrop Frye, which I can do no better than paraphrase. A myth is essentially a story about a god. It develops from an oral, communal tradition, and myths differ from folk tales only because they are organised into the more complicated structure of a mythology. Such a mythology attempts to explain the creation of a complex society. It thus often also produces a theogony, a chronicle of the gods from their origins to the present day, and constantly is revised to fit the changing needs of the society from which it arises. In just such a way, modern society has continually redefined its theories of myth itself, and these conflicting viewpoints have, in turn, variously informed the uses made of myth by poets, makers of their own secondary worlds. I shall take the seven major theories of myth in their historical order.

The earliest, and most obvious, interpretation of myth was that it is ancient history transcribed, 'the gods you worship were once men'⁸. This view provided an easy weapon for later Christian apologists, of whom the Sicilian Euhemerus⁹ gave it his name. His lost Sacred History supposedly revealed that both Kronos and Zeus were merely kings of Crete, not Creation. More sinister was the way in which this theory could be reversed, and thus used to trace present autocrats back to the gods. The most striking examples here include Virgil's glorification of Rome and Augustus in the Aeneid¹⁰, the early Tudors' attempt to trace their origins in Welsh Arthurian myth¹¹, and Elizabeth I's subsequent self-identification with Diana and Astraea¹². More recently, the historian has been seen, ironically, as himself a myth maker, extrapolating 'res gestae' - the reality of history - from 'historia rerum gestarum' - the accounts which survive¹³. Allied to this is the idea of myth itself as a 'para-history', accompanying real history but recording

'not what happened but what people, at different times, said or believed had happened'¹⁴.

If sober historians are only concocting fictions, then a poet's version of the past is no less true, indeed more emotionally coherent, because such imagination is overt. Mercian Hymns, therefore, is a more complex achievement than any lineal historical survey of the Midlands, a better myth, a more realistic legend.

The main rival to euhemerism as a portmanteau theory was that myth is a kind of primitive science, a structuring of the natural world. 'All metamorphoses are the physics of the early ages', Ovid's poem is a manual of alchemical, hidden knowledge¹⁵. The folly of reducing myth to such a secret language was satirised by Ben Jonson in The Alchemist, an attack on such cloudy, misleading rhetoric.

'Both this, th'Hesperian Garden, Cadmus' story
Jove's shower, the boon of Midas, Argus' eyes,
Boccace's Demogorgon, thousands more
All abstract riddles of our Stone'¹⁶.

An offshoot of this same theory was the idea of aetiology¹⁷. Myths were regarded here as mistaken explanations of phenomena, whether of human life or external nature¹⁸. Poets proved eager to plunder such intriguing narratives, the fanciful invention of origins, whether in the stately playfulness of courtly epillia -

'Therefore in sign her treasure suffered wrack,
Since Hero's time hath half the world been black'¹⁹ -

or in Ted Hughes bitter cosmology, where such blackness is due to Crow's negation.

A third school of theorists interpreted myth instead as moral didacticism. Perhaps 'the Greek gods are rakes, and unnatural rakes'²⁰, but all can be thus interpreted as mere allegory. 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning'²¹, an approach which dismantles the paradox of a (supposedly) Christian culture deriving so many of its educational models from an (undoubtedly) pagan literature. Mythology, thus cleansed, could become a 'non-discursive form of ethical teaching'²². This impulse lay behind those mythological handbooks, most notably Boccaccio's Genealogia Deorum²³, which became the stock in trade for any serious Renaissance poet, a kind of moral esperanto. 'Boccaccio's Demogorgon', invented by the Italian but passed off as a classical deity, is referred to as ~~such~~ ^{this} by Jonson - as already seen - and by Spenser, Marlowe, Dryden, Milton and even Shelley²⁴. Such allegorical interpretation could easily become absurd²⁵ or self-defeating²⁶. The whole theory was later turned on its head when Bultmann attempted to de-mythologize the New Testament²⁷, seeing myth as obscuring, rather than expressing, an ethical code. Similarly, the major employment of this device by post-war poets has again been essentially negative. Seamus Heaney has used Northern legend to stress intolerance and pointless sacrifice; Ted Hughes has created an alternative to the biblical account of creation, with Crow, in which God is impotent, the universe 'a horror beyond redemption'²⁸ and morals nonsensical.

The 19th century added two further theories to his maelstrom: myth as philology and myth as ritual. F. Max Müller's description of myth as 'a disease of language' has, nevertheless, a long and distinguished history²⁹, the gods being regarded as

'nothing but poetical names which are gradually allowed to assume a
divine personality never contemplated by their original inventors'³⁰.

Myth is therefore an adjunct of poetry - rather than vice versa - Cassirer's idea of myth as itself a kind of language, a 'symbolic form'³¹ through which we can apprehend external reality. Ruthven has drawn an interesting parallel here with the French symbolist poets. For Mallarmé language becomes in effect a form of myth³² transcending verbal communication, the senses beguilingly confused.

'Le pur soleil qui remise
Trop d'éclat pour l'y trier
Ôte ébloui sa chemise
Sur le dos au vitrier'³³.

Here, syntax 'appeals to nothing but itself, to nothing outside the world of the poem',³⁴ its own mythology. Conversely, certain scholars saw myth not as a ritual ordering of words but as a verbalisation of ritual; 'in almost every case the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth',³⁵. This forms the mastering impulse behind J.G.Frazer's monumental work of anthropology The Golden Bough. The priest of Nemi, the Sacred Wood, is traced through a bewildering maze of primitive fertility rites, to his mythic origins as Jupiter (his spouse is Diana)

'The Goddess whom he served and married ... no other than the Queen of Heaven, the true wife of the sky-god',³⁶.

The 'Cambridge School' applied these new insights specifically to classical myth. This developed, under the influence of Roger Fry, to the idea of myth as a symptom of spiritual unease - 'mythology ... springs like ritual from arrested, unsatisfied desire',³⁷. If these theories, perhaps understandably, inspired little poetry - least of all in the verse translations of Greek drama by Gilbert Murray, another Cambridge ritualist³⁸ - Jessie L. Weston's arcane burrowings certainly did. Her work developed out of Frazer's source material in an exactly contrary direction to Fry's. From Ritual to Romance³⁹ postulated the Grail legends as folk memories of a lost fertility religion of ancient Europe, the king ritually slain each Spring to bring rebirth, renewal. This fired, almost immediately, The Waste Land and a whole revival of the quest tradition, from Auden to Geoffrey Hill, its imagery as potent as it now seems historically dubious⁴⁰. Ritual is seen not as a disease - as it was for Fry - but a healing force, 'stirring/dull roots with spring rain',⁴¹.

The present century has developed two further tools with which to dissect myth, killing as they probe, structuralism and psycho-analysis. Freud related myth both to dream and to the unconscious mind (three of the prime sources of poetry).

'A large part of the mythological view of the world ... is nothing but psychology projected into the physical world',⁴².

As for Fry or Jane Harrison, myths are evidence of psychic, or sexual, imbalance. Theseus's adventures in the labyrinth, by such a reckoning, are 'a representation of anal birth: the twisting paths are the bowels and Ariadne's thread is the umbilical cord',⁴³. It is no surprise that such heavy literalism, straightforward as a jigsaw puzzle, has influenced not literary creation but literary criticism. This is seen at its finest in Ernest Jones' teasing out of the Oedipus theme in

Hamlet⁴⁴. In contrast, Jung believed that man had become sick precisely because he was alienated from the 'mythopeic substratum of his being'⁴⁵. This was itself a universal and underlying 'collective unconscious' which is

'identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us'⁴⁶.

It is expressed through certain 'archetypal images', the building blocks of both poetry and myth. Unfortunately, attempts -like Maud Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry⁴⁷ - to isolate these mythic images have so far proved futile, revealing the poet's individual preferences and obsessions, not those of the tribe. Jung's theories are certainly less dismissive of the arts than those of Freud. His search for universals not the particular has close links with Cassirer's idea of myth as a 'symbolic form' of expression, along with language, science and poetry itself, for

'the spirit opposes an image world of its own to the factual world of experience, pure experience as opposed to derivative impression'⁴⁸.

This is somewhat vague, a scheme of little direct application to either poetry or its criticism. Cassirer's real breakthrough was his idea, akin to Jung, that there exist 'basic mythical configurations' united by their 'underlying structural form'⁴⁹, an insight central to structuralism. Myth studies are again an offshoot of linguistics, the synchronic (as opposed to diachronic) methods of de Saussure⁵⁰ developed into Claude Levi-Strauss' search for 'mythemes', the basic constituent parts of myth, and the structures into which they are built.

'The true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning'⁵¹.

Roland Barthes attempted to create such structures in Mythologies⁵², a collection of contemporary legends (a more accurate definition), 'semiologies' which indicate modern values through the meaning given to such symbols. Thus steak and chips are a sign of worldly success; alternatively Caesar's hairstyle in a contemporary French film sums up our received opinions of the classical world. The eventual result of such symbols is, as seemingly that of much recent myth-criticism, wholly destructive. The 'very end of myths is to immobilise the world'⁵³. Conversely, the best poetry has always struggled to be constructive, reanimating myth - taking it away from those who would either emasculate or ignore it - and turning it again into a living

force. We return to Eliot's 'continuous parallel' between art and reality, the everyday and the transcendental.

Indeed, to paraphrase Frye again, myth remains, for poets if not scholars, primarily a source of stories, to be repeated or adapted at will. Poetry and myth have three major points of contact. Myth provides the 'total verbal communication' of a society. It enables the creation of a poetry rich in natural metaphor. Myths are themselves 'abstract literary patterns' ready to be developed into art. A few precise definitions would help here, based on the authority of the Oxford English Dictionary⁵⁴. The word 'mythology' was first used by Lydgate in 1412 to indicate 'the exposition of myths'. Its second meaning, 'a mythical story', is now rare, though it was in common use in the 17th century. The third definition, 'a body of myths', and the fourth, 'that department of knowledge that deals with myths', both came to prominence in the 19th century; they reveal a confusion similar to that in the Greek⁵⁵, 'mythology' being both a set of myths and the study of myth itself. 'Myth' itself is introduced much later, first noted in 1830, and takes on two additional meanings, again deriving from a similar dichotomy in the Greek⁵⁶. Myth is 'a purely fictitious narrative' and, leading from this, 'a fictitious person or object' - the popular, unliterary definition of myth as a lie, an untruth. The most important process at work here is one of specialisation, of narrowing down. The Greek word 'mythologia' was thus sharpened from meaning 'general utterances' to connote 'stories' and, eventually, 'traditional tales of gods and heroes'⁵⁷. In the same way, G.S.Kirk separates off 'legends' - stories based on historical events - moral fables and folklore to define a myth as a 'traditional tale', a 'narrative with a dramatic structure and a climax...attractive or important enough to be passed from generation to generation'⁵⁸. Myths are 'multiform, imaginative, inconsistent',

'on the one hand good stories, on the other bearers of important messages about life in general and life-within-society in particular'⁵⁹.

In this study, I shall use 'myth' to indicate a traditional tale which arises communally, and 'mythology' to mean a collection of such tales (not their study). I shall take 'legend' to connote a localised and unauthentic story 'popularly regarded as historical'⁶⁰, and 'folktale' to indicate a story concerned not with the gods but the 'life, problems and aspirations of ordinary people'⁶¹. There are no hard and fast rules here, especially in the interaction between oral and written

culture. The recounter of myth and the literary artist who shapes it - imparting to it his own personality - are often one and the same man. Such culture is not linear but circular, an endless round of myth into poetry, poetry back into myth.

'Folk traditions, beliefs and legends are drawn up by poets and story tellers from the common stock and shaped into literature, which ... is reshaped as folk tales, ballads and proverbial sayings, until these in their turn become the inspirations of a new poet'⁶².

If myth criticism has evolved - albeit towards incomprehension - into a science of mythology, then literary criticism has similarly attempted to analyse this interface between myth and poetry. One possible approach was 'thematology'. Here a specific myth is examined not structurally, as by Levi-Strauss, but historically, a diachronic rather than synchronic approach. This isolates the way in which different writers turn a myth to their own ends⁶³, but prove, ultimately, only the obvious; it is history, not myth, that is illuminated and displayed.

'All myths go through much the same stages in mirroring the different ages ... any one of the enduring myths provides a model for the rest'⁶⁴.

More pervasive has been the search, following Jung, for literary archetypes. Joseph Campbell has further reduced these to one underlying pattern, the monomyth of separation, initiation and return, 'a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return'⁶⁵. Unfortunately, other critics have, with equal assurance, posited a different archetype as all-embracing. Mircea Eliade suggested that of creation⁶⁶, Geza Roheim 'the death and apotheosis of the Primal Father'⁶⁷ and Fitzroy Raglan an 'ur-ritual celebrating the Dying God'⁶⁸. Ruthven is, as usual, clear headed. Such aberrations are not only essentially implausible, but they demean literature (and myth), taking away attention from

'the local specificities of a particular book towards some myth which is held to be older and grander than the book one is ... talking about'⁶⁹.

Indeed, Martin Dodsworth has pointed out a kind of mythic faking carried out by some poets to answer this demand for ready archetypes, 'the taint of academicism'⁷⁰. Again, in his essay 'Mrs Bennet and the Dark Gods: the Truth about Jane Austen'⁷¹, Douglas Bush, most sensible of myth critics, has parodied excessive searching for archetypes in the most realistic, unsymbolic literary texts. Philip Rahv's remark about Joseph and his Brothers - 'it is not so much a mythic novel as a novel on mythic themes'⁷² - should always be borne in mind. The most extraordinary work to

equate myth and poetry, however, remains Northrop Frye's The Anatomy of Criticism. Literature itself is seen to be a myth system, seasonal and cyclic; mythology is itself 'a grammar of literary archetypes'. Poetry is a myth, 'myth' a kind of poem.

Poets too have erected complex mythological systems, and for much the same reasons, to clarify their own work and provide a theoretical backbone for the flesh of creation. In the three most outstanding - and eccentric - myth systems of the century, the real subject is not the need for a poetic mythology but the author's fear of coming chaos. His structure is not a fortress but 'fragments I have shored against my ruin'⁷⁴. Thus, in A Vision, W.B. Yeats used automatic writing, the prompting of the spirit, to divide humanity into the 28 phases of the moon, subject to the winding gyres of Concord and Discord. History is seen as an endless circle in which men are condemned always to play out the same roles, in which each era always ends in anarchy, 'those who do violence'⁷⁵. History is also the symbol of individual existence. 'The life of Christ corresponds to the mid-period between life and death'⁷⁶, the spirit is purified after each death - 'the more complete the expiation the more fortunate the succeeding life'⁷⁷ - but the era of Christ is drawing to its end, as did that of Leda before⁷⁸, and his own death approaches. In 'The End of the Cycle', Yeats admits that this new era terrifies him, that his system, so laboriously constructed, brings no real revelation, displays no comfort.

'But nothing comes - though this moment was to reward me for all my toil.
Perhaps I am too old'⁷⁹.

In The White Goddess⁸⁰, Robert Graves is writing, unlike Yeats, for others (rather than just for himself), basing his discoveries on historical myths rather than spirit language, but the underlying purpose remains the same. A chance connection between the Welsh poem Cad Goddeu and certain Greek tree alphabets leads Graves to synthesise, from a wide body of myth, the dominant figure of the White Goddess. She represents the three eternal aspects of woman - mother, bride and layer out of the dead - and, tied in with the seasons and (again) the phases of the moon, enacts

'the single grand theme of poetry; the life, death and resurrection of
the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess's son and lover'⁸¹.

Any true poet must worship the Goddess, vengeful as she is, and such blind devotion is the 'single poetic theme', from Shakespeare's Sycorax to Keats' 'Belle Dame sans Merci'. This is inimical to any Christianising tendency, destroying G.M. Hopkins, for

'it has become impossible to combine the once identical functions of poet and priest without doing violence to one calling or the other'⁸².

Graves makes a further distinction between Apollonian, or Classical, poetry - which celebrates authority - and truly Bardic verse, dedicated to the Goddess. In the present 'cockney civilization', poets have lost touch with the natural world, and thus the Goddess; 'the myths too are wearing thin'⁸³. The whole work, subtitled a 'historical grammar of poetic myth', is a sustained attack on the modern world. Its 'patriarchal God' and 'theocratic society' are twin 'causes of our unrest', which is further mirrored in the encroaching 'faith' of communism. Graves calls, through his worship of the Goddess, for the poet to reassert his role as the conscience of the race, at present lost in a world which, as for Yeats, has gone mad; a world where

'money will buy almost anything but truth, and almost anyone but the truth-obsessed poet'⁸⁴.

In Apocalypse⁸⁵, the third of these myth-systems, D.H. Lawrence also attacks modern society through its myths, here concentrating his fury on the final book of the Bible. By default, the Book of Revelation 'shows what we are resisting, unnaturally'⁸⁶. What it condemns as evil is, for Lawrence, virtue; a Manichean sense of duality in which 'the supreme triumph is to be vividly, most perfectly alive'⁸⁷. Revelation therefore exemplifies Christianity at its most vindictive, giving the 'death kiss to the Gospels'⁸⁸, just as Judas did to Christ. Lawrence now turns to give an extraordinary reading of Revelation, as twisted a devotional sermon as The White Goddess is a mythic detective story, A Vision an eccentric manual of world history. He turns conventional wisdom on its head to reveal Saint John's vision as a pagan legend, overlaid with Judaic motifs, presenting

'the myth of the birth of a new sun-god from a great sun-goddess, and her pursuit by the great red dragon'⁸⁹,

creativity pursued by evil. If Yeats is despondent and Graves merely truculent, Lawrence turns his myth into a triumph. Good will eventually defeat bad, starting 'with the sun, and the rest will eventually happen'⁹⁰. As Ruthven indicates, Lawrence's method here creates as it apparently destroys, conversely 'remythifying basic materials in the very process of upending them'⁹¹. All three myth-systems are basically eccentric; they have little direct relevance to their creator's poetry (and yet without that it is doubtful if any of them would have reached print).

What they do reveal, unwittingly, is both the essential confusion and yet the inexplicable seriousness of genuine myth, far closer to its spirit than any dull academic exercise. It is in such obsessive creation that myth and poetry interact.

The attraction, however, of those four myth-systems which have continued, almost secretly, into modern poetry has been not arcane symbolism but general narrative, not individual grief but the the endlessly adaptable stories of the tribe. It is the variations, rather than similarities, of approach to these unchanging sources that prove illuminating and properly continue the tradition. One of the merits of the Greek pantheon, for example, has been its tidy and remarkably literary nature. Lacking the 'crude power and ecstatic dislocation of ordinary life'⁹² - or, indeed, most myth - it substitutes for this an unparalleled depth of association with English poetry⁹³. Indeed, it is only by default that classical myth is readily noticed, as in the 'decreations' of The Waste Land⁹⁴ or the memorials in Anglo-Saxon verse of a lost civilization, ruins of 'both masonry'⁹⁵ and mythology. The three main narratives of Greek myth have proved endlessly fascinating, ever adaptable. The fall of Troy may symbolise failed heroism - as in Gunn's 'The Wound'⁹⁶ - but it also presages the hope of Moly⁹⁷. The two doomed houses of Mycenae evoke Greek tragedy at its most ruthless - bloodshed postponed in 'Phaedra in the Farm House'⁹⁸ - yet Eliot could turn them into country house melodrama⁹⁹. Again, if Roy Fuller can turn the Greek heroic adventures into tragedy - 'teeth ground flat in violent dreams of guilt'¹⁰⁰ - his son John can, with equal truth, make the labours of Hercules into a complex literary game. Structure is erected here into its own myth, through which to allegorise human duality and failure.

'Yes, even so, the heroes gone at last
Who were the only status of a past
That bored us all and lied compulsively'¹⁰¹.

The Roman myths are again essentially literary and adaptable, 'created artificially, in a piecemeal fashion, over a long period of time'¹⁰². Pastoral¹⁰³ has been used, from The Shepheardes Calender to Thyrsis, to explore the nature of loss. Again, metamorphosis is social for Peter Porter, beastly for Gunn, for Roy Fisher magical

'exercises in changing, in full view, one thing into another whose nature was quite unforeseen at the outset ... playing over the startling idea until it began to loosen and dissolve, and yield place to another'¹⁰⁶.

Truly classical myth is 'everlasting elastic'^{I07}, a symbolism accepted precisely because no-one actually believes its tenets. The mythology of a religion still (at least officially) generally believed in poses more complex problems.

If classical gods have embroidered the surface of English poetry, then its essence has largely been Christian, though the second has often adopted the imagery of the first. Edwin Muir's The Labyrinth describes the Fall in terms of Theseus, a tortuous way back to Eden, 'strange that I shall hale me/to that strange land'^{I08}. Milton conjoins Judaic narrative and Greek reference, Christ - like Zeus - banishing the 'Typhon huge'^{I09}. Christian faith may have retreated from the allegorical certainties of The Dream of the Rood - wood itself transfigured^{I10} - or the medieval devotion of Pearl - vision as trust^{I11} - but on the 'darkling plain'^{I12} of Victorian doubt, belief was still possible, emblematic. See, for example, G.M.Hopkins view of shipwreck as Fall, death by sea an image of the Crucifixion.

'The dense and driven Passion, and frightful sweat:
Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be'^{I13}.

Christian myth remains both literary artefact and act of faith, image and essence,

'regarded, in a multitude of conflicting or overlapping definitions either as uniquely significant history or as uniquely true mythology'^{I14}.

It falls, again, into three major narratives. The Hebrew myths of the Old Testament remain, as Milton found^{I15}, most subject to free interpretation (because theologic-^{I16}ally superceded). Thus is made possible D.J.Enright's mischievous Adam Unparadised, Patrick Creagh's 'To Abel Day by Day' - tender and self-reproaching by turn - or John Cowper Powys' latinate epic Lucifer, Eden once more located on Olympus^{I17}. The New Testament narratives have been more relocated in the poet's image. Christ is relocated on an ice-flow^{I18}, constructed from iron in South America^{I19} and yet also found in a clay-pit^{I20}. Christ's face is a metaphorical ikon for Kathleen Abbott,^{I21} whereas his childhood is withdrawn, in 26 alphabetical sections, by Gavin Bantock.^{I22} Faith, too, depends on the poet's personality. In For the Time Being W.H.Auden makes^{I23} the Annunciation a complex celebration - 'all its occasions shall dance for joy' - while, for T.S.Eliot, an equally new convert, such knowledge brings only pain,

'... an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death'^{I24}.

Temperamental and doctrinal differences similarly colour the third variant of

Christian myth, the love of ritual. Geoffrey Hill's 'Tenebrae' is mysteriously emblematic^{I25}, Auden's 'Horae Canonicae' is direct and technically a tour-de-force,^{I26} David Jones' The Anathemata is its own ceremony. Here the Mass is redefined in terms of cockney slang and Arthurian myth.

'The cult man stands alone in Pellam's lands: more precariously than he knows he guards the signa ... he can fetch things new and old'^{I27}.

It is this sense of ancient holiness that Christian myth best evokes.

Indeed, Arthurian legend has formed the principal native source for poetic myth precisely because of the possibilities it provides for such allegory. The Welsh 'Matter of Britain' is overlaid with French courtly love^{I28}, tragedy is grafted onto epic; Malory's prose Le Mort D'Arthur itself welded by Caxton into one continuous narrative (myth again made literate). That alliterative masterpiece Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was, for all its exquisite moral structure - the shameful garter does still save Gawain - still set in a real, harsh world, 'wyth wodwos, þat woned in þe knarrez'^{I29}. Conversely, Arthur becomes, for Spenser, a shadowy representative of 'Magnificence'^{I30}, for Tennyson, a perfect Victorian^{I31}. It was by going back before Malory that modern poets have rediscovered Arthur: the approach to the Chapel Perilous - 'only the wind's home' - in The Waste Land^{I32}; Hill's Merlin considering the 'outnumbering dead'^{I33}; Gunn's Merlin contemplating escape, 'an end and yet another start'^{I34}. C.H.Sisson fuses faith and patriotism. He imagines Arthur dreaming away the centuries on Avalon, awaiting enlightenment.

'What augury? Or is there any such?

They pass over the oak and leave me there

Not even choosing, by the serpent's head'^{I35}.

Milton may have rejected the theme of Arthur for his national epic^{I36}, but three contemporary poets have centred their best work around him; David Jones - in the King Pellam's Laude' section of In Parenthesis as well as The Anathemata - Charles Williams and John Heath-Stubbs. For Williams the Grail is the perfect fulfillment of the Christian life, a world where 'the Incarnation and the Sacraments... happen', Logres is 'Britain and more than Britain'^{I37}. Williams remains more convincing as a myth theorist than as a poet. His verse is lyrically unpleasing, and the final section of The Region of the Summer Stars is forced rather than resolved, less argued than sermonising. Arthur is now forgotten; it is the Pope who is instead

'co-inherent all in Adam and all in Christ'^{I38}. Nevertheless, Williams' influence on Heath-Stubbs was more beneficial, and the later poet's Artorius^{I39} masterly. As carefully ordered as Idylls of the King to pursue the idea of order, enmeshing myth and modern reality - Taliesin/Tiresias, the church warden of Gloucester Road - Artorius clarifies and presents its creator's epic concerns. It is a serious comedy.

'Liberty, like Truth, lies in a tension
But no temporal forms finally translate
The idea of order, which ever more we are urged to'^{I40}.

It is Arthur whose very mystery best embodies this order, a kingly divinity.

The influence of native legend has been far more nebulous, depending on oral sources rather than literary myth, the 'old philosophy of this island'^{I41}. Since Lyrical Ballads^{I42}, folk traditions have proved a force for regeneration, a sure palliative against self-involvement. Such is Yeats' collation of Irish folklore^{I43}, Auden's recasting of a Mummers play in Paid on Both Sides^{I44}, Thom Gunn's Jack Straw^{I45}, or Vernon Watkins' ritually repetitive evocation of the Mari Lwyd, the horse of death.

'It is a skull we carry
in the ribbons of a bride'^{I46}.

Such native legends can be powerful even when fake. The most notorious examples here are the Romantic espousal of Ossian^{I47} and the supposedly 'secret diluvian truths' of the Druids^{I48}, Greek myth merely a second-hand accretion of ancient British wisdom^{I49}. Both sources, however spurious, could still prompt genuine poetry - real toads from imaginary gardens^{I50} - whether Blake's complex, changing mythology based on ancient Albion, or Doughty's religious magic (again from Britain's dawn).

'That golden Branch, which berries bears, aparks ...
Even Christ, our druid: which grafted, in our souls
Though die our flesh, shall they not taste of death'^{I52}.

This concern with the ancient - myths of brutality in North, myths of power in Mercian Hymns - often spills into landscape, the (literal) contours of the past. Briggflatts makes its own music from the sounds of old Northumbria - bull, mason and lark are all expressions of native earth - 'by such rocks/men killed Bloodaxe'^{I53}.

'Logan Stone' shapes itself like the sacred relic it evokes, an 'immobile motion' that is a legendary metaphor for the poet and his love, compressed into the timeless.

'what force it takes to be a
logan-
stone you and I what cold applied
granite-fire logging on weakness no storm can move us'^{I54}.

Similarly, Jeremy Hooker's early 'awareness of chalk and flint' is sharpened into legend in Solent Shore, past and present continuous, 'the Dorset hills like aerial tumuli',^{I56}. Indeed, such evocation need not lean on the ancient. Roy Fisher's City uses modern folklore to shape the modern urban landscape, 'a dry epic flavour, whose air is human breath',^{I57}. It is the localising that is important - Charles Olsen taught geographical scrupulousness as well as bad writing^{I58} - local pride is erected into complex myth. Thus Hugh Macdiarmid's Scotland becomes a thistle to a drunkard^{I59}, John Montague's The Rough Field evokes Ireland as that 'dark permanence of ancient forms',^{I60}. In native legend 'the chains go deep',^{I61}.

Before the present century, a poet could presuppose this common ground - of classical, biblical and Arthurian myth, perhaps also the legends of his own locality - as shared between himself and his audience, and in turn refer to it in various subtle ways. Such reference could be ironic (witness Chaucer's misogynist Merchant making the cuckolded Januarie's roll-call of wedded virtue all Biblical traitresses; Rebecca, Judith and Esther^{I62}) or suggestively erotic, coitus as myth.

'Leander now, like Theban Hercules,
Entered the orchard of th' Hesperides',^{I63}.

Milton's lists of exotic deities - Nisroch, Ashtaroth, Arimaspians^{I64} - emphasised deep learning, a high seriousness. In contrast, Spenser erected a stylistic distance from his material, subverting rape into coy domesticity and myth into allegory.

'Nor Jove himself, when he a swan would be
For love of Leda whiter did appear:
Yet Leda was they say as white as he',^{I65}.

Again, Marlowe made pastoral a pretty, unrealistic retreat - though Raleigh found such 'fragrant posies',^{I66} 'in folly ripe, in reason rotten',^{I67} - and yet for Marvell^{I68} it was a complex symbol for man and Nature, the nymph and her Faun. Myth is a garden

'The gods, that mortal beauty chase
Still in a tree did end their race',^{I69}.

Pope made myth arbiter of established order, knowing 'when to repress and when indulge our flights',^{I70}, thus satirising any human folly placed near it. Dulness is made divine^{I71}, Belinda's 'rape' is overburdened by its complex cosmology of genii.^{I72} Shelley, conversely, made the pantheon symbol of a new order, myths of revolution.

'A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore',^{I73}.

Myth can indeed express temperament. Keats's poetry deepens from sensuous delight to sad elegy, from 'a white Naiad in a rippling stream'^{I74} to 'the pale Omega of a withered race'^{I75}. Again, Tennyson's melancholy - Arthur passing like the sun, the Greek gods 'careless of mankind...looking over wasted lands'^{I77} declines into Swinburne's sadistic decadence, 'a ghost, a bitter and luxurious god'^{I78}. As earlier, for Blake, myth seemed to be losing its force, its terminology hidebound.

'The languid strings do scarcely move!

The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!'^{I79}.

Clough could stress this discontinuity between myth and reality, in modern Italy, while still perversely hoping otherwise (as he rejected faith while wishing for it).

'Is it illusion or does there a spirit from perfecter ages

Here, even yet, amid loss, change and corruption abide?'^{I80}.

The horrors of the Great War turned Wilfred Owen from a shallow neo-Keatsian -

'Let slip the writhing of Antaeus' wrists:

Those hero's hands that wrenched the necks of bulls'^{I81} -

into a real poet, dealing with real experience, 'well, blood is dirt'^{I82}. After two holocausts, poetic myth seemed, for many, evasion not explanation, a sad abdication of responsibility^{I83}. What had once been common ground was irretrievably (or so it seemed) churned into the mud of the Somme, the mass graves of Auschwitz.

The loss of such common ground has led poets either to abandon myth or to employ a mythology not readily understood by the general reader, impoverishment or obscurity. Four escape routes from this impasse have, so far, been laboriously hacked out, conveniently enough by the four most interesting British poets to emerge since the war. Seamus Heaney has adapted his native legends, archetypes of ritual slaughter, into a way of understanding, and going beyond, the present Irish 'Troubles.' Geoffrey Hill has erected his Mercian heritage into a new legend, in which Offa reigns again, lord of past, present and future. Thom Gunn has made the Circe myth an archetype of beasthood into godhead, a focus for his psychedelic vision. Most ambitious of all, Ted Hughes has created the new myth of Crow, no less than an alternative history of the universe. It is the intention of this study to show how this nervous, fragmentary use of mythology has provided some (if not most) of the major poetry written since myth and legend - classical, Christian or otherwise - effectively went underground.

Notes.

1. John Comper Powys, Preface to Lucifer, London 1956, (1974 reprint p 14)
2. Frank Kermode, Puzzles and Epiphanies, London 1962: pp 35-9 'The myth kitty'.
3. T.S.Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' (1923), repr. in The Modern Tradition, ed. Ellmann and Feidelson, New York 1965, pp 679-81.
4. Philip Larkin, Poets of the 1950's, ed. D.J.Enright, Tokyo 1955.
 'As a guiding principal I believe that every poem must be its own sale freshly-created universe, and therefore have no belief in "tradition" or a common myth-kitty'.
5. Mythology, ed. P. Miranda, Harmondsworth 1972. Essays range from the entertaining to the frustrating, from semantics to mathematics, but have little relevance to literature, except in a mutual concern with linguistics.
6. Saint Augustine, Confessions xi 14, quoted K.K.Ruthven Myth (The Critical Idiom series) London 1976, p 1.
7. The Concise Encyclopedia of English and American Poets and Poetry, ed. S. Spender and D. Hall, London 1963, pp 225-228, 'Myth and Poetry'.
8. Clement of Alexandria, Exhortations to the Heathen (iv), quoted Ruthven p 6.
9. See Ruthven p 5-10; H.J.Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology 1928 (new ed 1964) pp 5-6. Nevertheless, G.S.Kirk tersely dismisses such theories as 'influential if tedious', Myth, its meaning and functions, Cambridge 1971 p 2.
10. Virgil, Aeneid ed. E.V.Rieu, Harmondsworth 1956, see especially Introduction pp II-24. Cf Nazi theorising, as in Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts, Munchen 1930 in which Alfred Rosenberg again derives ideology from myth.
11. See Edwin Greenlaw, Studies in Spencer's Historical Allegory, Baltimore 1932.
12. See E.C.Wilson, England's Eliza, Cambridge, Mass. 1939.
13. Ruthven p 10, quoting Peter Munz 'History and Myth', Philosophical Quarterly VI, pp 1-16.
14. Michael Grant, Roman Myths London 1971, rev. ed. Harmondsworth 1973p xvi.
15. Bernard Fontenelle, 'Of the Origin of Fables' (1724), repr. in The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860, London 1972 quoted Ruthven p 10. See also Elias Ashmole, Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum for the wilder shores of alchemy. For the general theory see Ruthven pp 10-17, Rose pp 6-9, G.S.Kirk The Nature of Greek Myths Harmondsworth 1974 pp 43-52.
16. Ben Jonson, The Alchemist Act II Scene I, l.101-4.
17. See Kirk (1974) pp 53-57.
18. J.G.Frazer, Apollodorus: The Library London 1921 p xxvii, quoted Ruthven p 16.

19. Christopher Marlowe, Hero and Leander Sestiad I lines 49-50. For a succinct account of epillia see Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems and Translations Ed. S. Orgel, Harmondsworth 1971, pp 219-20.
20. G.M.Hopkins, letter to Dixon, 23 Oct 1886, quoted Ruthven p 25.
21. Romans 15.4.
22. Ruthven p 26. See also Kirk (1974) pp 60-66,
23. Boccaccio, Geneologia Deorum. The Preface and Books 14-15 are translated into English by Charles Osgood in Boccaccio on Poetry Princeton 1930. Ruthven quotes xiv 13, 'pagan poets had an imperfect sense of the true faith'.
The three other most widely used handbooks were Lilio Giraldis's De Deis Gentium (1548), Vincenzo Cartati's Le Imagini calla Sposizione degli Antichi (1556) and Natale Conti's Mythologiae (1567) both in their original Latin and through many translations, i.e. Robert Lynche's The Fountain of Ancient Fiction (1599). In much the same way, Lempriere's Classical Dictionary (1788) fueled the allusions of Keats and a generation of Romantic poets - compare the entry on 'hyacinthia' with stanza 4 of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.
24. See Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry, Harvard 1937, pp 146-9. With his earlier study of Renaissance verse, Bush has laid a solid, brave foundation to which all later critics are indebted, both for his sensitive tracing of the relation between myth and poetry and for the remarkably complete bibliography, ~~a year by year~~ listing of mythical poems.
25. Rose, with typical dry humour, quotes (p 5) the suggestion that Dick Whittington made his fortune through a successful venture in a ship called 'The Cat' - 'legendary details are often enough added to historical facts'.
26. See Ruthven p 29 - the Index of books proscribed by the Catholic Church included the 'Ovid Moralizatus' but not Ovid's original works.
27. See Rudolf Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth: a theological debate ed. H. Bartsch, New York 1961. For an excellent short discussion of the whole complex development of the Entmythologisierung school see Ian Henderson, Myth in the New Testament (Studies in Biblical Theology 7) London 1952.
28. Ted Hughes, Crow London 1970, p 57.
29. See Kirk pp 57-8, typically sound and astringent, Ruthven p 30-35, typically brilliant and yet boiled down almost to the point of unreadability. Ruthven's short study is a mine of fascinating obscurities, many quoted here, but it is as if his conclusions on this material have been compressed beyond meaning.
30. F.Max Muller, Lectures on the Science of Language, 6th ed, London 1880, p 12. again unearthed by Ruthven, p 34. If the devil has the best tunes, then surely Ruthven has been granted the best quotations.
31. See Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, transl. S.Langer, New York 1946.

32. See Ruthven p 34.
33. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Le Vitrier', Mallarmé ed. A. Hartley, Harmondsworth 1965.
 'The perfect sun, which throws away too much light for reckoning, dazzled
 removes its shirt from the glazier's back' (p 78).
34. Donald Davie, Articulate Energy London 1955, p 152.
35. Robertson Smith, The Religion of the Semites, Edinburgh 1889 p 19. See also
 Ruthven pp 35-38; Kirk (1974) pp 66-68, quoting E.R. Leach (p 67), 'myth implies
 ritual, ritual implies myth, they are one and the same'.
36. J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion 3rd ed. London
 Part VII, Vol II, Calder 1913, p 303. See also R.A. Downie, Frazer and the Golden Bough,
 London 1970 (p 161-8 reveals Frazer's own disinterest in the literature of
 his time) and John Vickery, The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough, Princeton
 N.J. 1973, which sets out very clearly the varied effect of Frazer's work on
 Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence and Joyce.
37. Jane Harrison, Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion London 1921, p 27-8.
38. See T.S. Eliot's attack on Murray in favour of the translations of the American
 imagist H.D. see Selected Essays London 1932 p 63, quoted by Bush (1937) in
 a partial defence of Murray's Swinburnian lushness as against H.D.'s sharp
 edges (pp 497-506) which also stresses Murray's greater truth to the original.
39. Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance, Cambridge 1920.
40. See Geoffrey Ashe, King Arthur's Avalon London 1957, chapter 7 'The Grail'.
41. T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, London 1922 lines 3-4. Eliot states in the notes
 to his poem that 'Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the
 poem better than my notes can do'. See, for example the debt of section III
 to Weston's chapter IX, 'The Fisher King' - 'while I was fishing in the dull
 canal' (l. 189) - and of section V to Weston's chapter XIII, 'The Perilous
 Chapel' - 'there is the empty chapel, only the wind's home' (l. 388).
42. Sigmund Freud, Complete Psychological Works London 1953-64, The Psychopathology
of Everyday Life (1901), Volume vi, p 258. See also Totem and Taboo (1913),
 C.P.W. Volume xiii p 91 and Ruthven pp 17-25, Kirk (1974) Chapter 4 pp 69-91 -
 'Myths as Products of the Psyche' - Rose's tart rejection p 10.
43. Freud, C.P.W. Volume xxii p 25.
44. Ernest Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus, London 1949.
 See also Frederick Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind, Baton Rouge
 1957 for the wilder shores of literary theory.
45. Anthony Storr, Jung, London 1973, p 42. See also Jolande Jacobi, The
Psychology of C.G. Jung London 1942.

46. Carl Jung, Collected Works ed. H. Read et al, 1953- , ix (I) pp 3-4. See also Joseph L. Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man', Man and His Symbols, conceived and edited by Carl Jung, London 1964 pp 104-157.
47. Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry London 1934. See Ruthven p 22.
48. Kirk (1974) p 80. See Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Vol 2 ; Mythical Thought New Haven 1955.
49. See Ruthven p 74.
50. Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de Linguistique Generale, Geneva 1916.
51. Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth' in Myth ed. T. Sebeok, Bloomington 1958, pp 50-66, revised for Structural Anthropology New York 1963, p 211. See Ruthven, pp 40-43, Kirk (1970) section II, pp 42-83, 'Levi-Strauss and the Structural Approach'.
52. Roland Barthes, Mythologies, selected and translated by A. Lavers, London 1972. See, in particular, 'The Romans in Films', 'Steak and Chips'.
53. Ibid (1973 reprint) p 155 - 'man is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world!'. The whole final section 'Myth Today' is of great interest, if only for something with which to violently disagree.
54. New English Dictionary, Oxford 1933 entries on myth, mythology.
55. See Kirk (1974) pp 13-29 'Problems of Definition'. For Plato, 'muthologia' meant 'talking about or telling stories', again practice and study combined.
56. Kirk p 22. Aristotle used 'muthos', originally meaning simply an 'utterance', in the Poetics to describe the plot of a play. Combined with 'logos' - 'theory' - 'muthologia' thus came to have the further sense of 'untruth'.
57. See Kirk (1974) chapter 2, pp 30-37, 'The Relation of Myths to Folktales'.
58. Kirk (1974) p 27, a further refinement of the eminently clear-headed viewpoint (something of great rarity in this field) of Kirk (1970) pp 31-41.
59. Kirk (1974) pp 28-29.
60. N.E.D. entry on legend.
61. Kirk (1974) pp 33-34.
62. Katherine Briggs, British Folktales and Legends: A Sampler London 1977 p 2. Bob Pegg, in Folk, London 1976 pp 7-8 quotes the 1954 International Folk Music Council which defined the three major factors shaping the folk tradition -
 - i) continuity that links the present with the past.
 - ii) variation which springs from the creative individual or the group.
 - iii) selection by the community, which determines the forms that survive.

63. For example, E.S.Hartland, The Legend of Perseus London 1894-6; William Stanford, The Ulysses Theme, Oxford 1954; Harry Levin, The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance, London 1970.
64. Ruthven p 73.
65. Arnold van Gennep, Les Rites de Passage, Paris 1909, quoted in Joseph Campbell The Hero with a Thousand Faces, New York 1949 p 30, 37.
66. Ruthven p 76.
67. Geza Roheim, American Image ii (1941) p 278.
68. Fitzroy Richard Somerset, Baron Raglan, The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama, London 1936.
69. Ruthven p 75.
70. Martin Dodsworth, 'Introduction' to The Survival of Poetry ed. Dodsworth, pp II-36, discussing in detail James Dickey's 'The Ice Skin', Edward Lucie-Smith's 'Genesis' and the curse of the 'translatable poem' (p 20).
71. Douglas Bush, 'Mrs Bennet and the Dark Gods: the Truth about Jane Austen', Sewanee Review lxiv, pp591-6.
72. Philip Rahv, 'The Myth and the Powerhouse', Partisan Review xx (1953) p 645; a typically acerbic demolition job.
73. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: four essays, Princeton 1957. Literature moves from epic to tragedy to romance to satire and then back to epic.
74. T.S.Eliot, The Waste Land line 430.
75. W.B.Yeats, A Vision, London 1937; 2nd corrected edition, London 1962, p 140.
76. Ibid. p 263.
77. Ibid. p 236.
78. Cf. 'Leda and the Swan', 'The Second Coming'.
79. A Vision p 301. Nevertheless, Yeats admits that he is a 'much better educated man than ten years ago and much more powerful in argument' (p 8).
80. Robert Graves, The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth, London 1946, revised 1952, further enlarged and amended edition, London 1961.
81. Ibid p 422.
82. Ibid p 425.
83. Ibid pp458-9.
84. Ibid p 14.
85. D.H.Lawrence, Apocalypse; London 1932, reprinted with an introduction by Richard Aldington, Harmondsworth 1974.

86. Ibid p 125.
87. Ibid p 125.
88. Ibid p 18.
89. Ibid p 85.
90. Ibid p 126.
91. Ruthven p 47.
92. Kirk (1974) p 91.
93. See, again, the two essential studies by Douglas Bush discussed in note 24; Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry, Minneapolis 1932 and Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry, Cambridge, Mass., 1937, together with the later, more general (and considerably less detailed) Pagan Myth and Christian Tradition in English Poetry, Philadelphia 1968.
94. Craig Raine's interpretation of The Waste Land, reincarnation towards degeneration rather than perfection, quoted by Michael Schmidt in Fifty Modern British Poets, London 1979 p 130.
95. 'The Ruin', The Earliest English Poems, translated M. Alexander, Harmondsworth 1966, pp 29-31, probably the Roman ruins of Bath, (poem itself part lost).
 'Well-wrought this wall: Vierds broke it.
 The stronghold burst'
96. Thom Gunn, Fighting Terms Swinford 1954, revised New York 1958, further revised London 1962, p 9 - 'growing up - to see Troy burn - /as Neoptolemus'.
97. Thom Gunn, Moly, London 1971, p 11 - 'when I was near the house of Circe, I met Hermes in the likeness of a young man'.
98. Ibid pp 19-20 - 'the chimney will be split/and that waistcoat be blood'.
99. i.e. T.S.Eliot's The Family Reunion, London 1939, brings up to date the myth of Orestes in terms of polite drama, a no more (or less) 'true' account of the myth than, say Jean-Paul Sartre's more overtly brutal treatment in Les Nouches.
100. Roy Fuller, Mythological Sonnet XIX, Collected Poems London 1962 p 210.
101. John Fuller, The Labours of Hercules: A Sonnet Sequence (MICA poets II), Manchester 1969, sonnet 14.- 'the theme of these poems is an allegory of a basic human duality' (p 1). The same basic idea, fictionalising the hero's 12 tasks, is just as brilliantly turned into detective fiction in Agatha Christie's The Labours of Hercules, London 1947, the labours of Hercule Poirot.
102. Michael Grant, Roman Myths, London 1971, rev. ed. Harmondsworth 1973, p xv.
103. See, for example, William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, London 1935.
104. Peter Porter, 'Metamorphosis', Once Bitten, Twice Bitten, London 1961,

'As in a werewolf film I'm horrible, far
Below the collar - my fingers crack, my tyrant suit
Chokes me as it hugs me in its fire'

- I05. Moly pp14-15; man attempts to metamorphosise back from animal to human form,
'From this fat dungeon I could rise to skin
And human title, putting pig within'.
- I06. Roy Fisher, The Cut Pages, London 1971, Note p 7, commenting on his five
'Metamorphoses' - 'the mass of things, indistinguishable one from another,
loosing their qualities into the common cloud, their depth squashed by the
refraction and obscured in the stain, forms pushed out of line' (p 15).
- I07. J.A.Symons, Essays Speculative and Suggestive London 1890, Vol 2, p 147,
quoted Ruthven p 4.
- I08. Edwin Muir, 'The Border', The Labyrinth, London 1949 p 35. A remarkable
collection which gains further cohesion at each reading, a myth for our time.
'Scene after scene, the tale my fathers told,
But I in the middle blind, as Homer blind'. (p 9).
- I09. John Milton, 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' (1629) lines 224-6,
'Nor all the Gods beside,
Longer dare abide,
Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine'.
- II0. Henry Sweet, An Anglo-Saxon Reader, Oxford 1967 (rev. D. Whitelock) p 153-9.
The poet sees, in a dream, the Cross, an image shifting between glory and
suffering. It becomes a surrogate for Christ - 'purhdrifan hi me mid deorcan
naeglum ... opene inwidhlemmas' (they pierced me with dead nails ... the
open wounds of malice) - yet suffering leads to salvation after 'wita
heordost/lēodum lādōst' (the harshest of punishments/most hateful to people).
- III. See Medieval English Verse, transl. Brian Stone, Harmondsworth 1964, pp 136-74.
The poet's grief for his dead child, allegorised as Pearl, is transmuted both
by her own 'blysse' and through legend - the vision of the New Jerusalem and
the procession of angels, led by the Lamb of God, which concludes the poem.
- II2. Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach', 'we are here as on a darkling plain' -
The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar'.
- II3. G.M.Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' stanza 7, Poems and Prose of
Gerald Manley Hopkins ed. M.H.Gardner, Harmondsworth 1953 p 14. The
Crucifixion is mirrored by the death of the nuns, 'five ... the cipher of

suffering Christ', the poem ending with a hymn of submission and praise to God, and a plea for the mythic rebirth of England (stanza 35) -

'Our King back, oh, upon English souls

Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be
a crimson-cressed east'.

- II4. Elizabeth Cook, The Ordinary and the Fabulous, London 1969, p 38.

Before this century, the bible provided 'the only highly developed, literary, mythological stories which were heard by uneducated people in the Christian period, and they meant as much as the Greek stories to poets and men of letters' (p 38).

- II5. See C.A. Patrides, Milton and the Christian Tradition, Oxford 1966. Milton is certainly more free with Old Testament myth in Paradise Lost than with New Testament myth in Paradise Regained - the latter is too intrinsically holy to be too much embroidered.

- II6. D.J. Enright, Paradise Illustrated, London 1978. The title poem re-enacts the Fall in a comic, wry, ultimately rather bitter way, the impact of death -

'It was different in my day'

Said Adam.

'People lived for ever then'. (Poem XXXII p 40).

- II7. Patrick Creagh, To Abel and Others, London 1970. Cain addresses his brother throughout, the murderer murdered (without punctuation) -

'I am afraid of your last depths

fish in their own monstrous light' (p 32).

- II8. John Comper Powys, Lucifer, London 1956. The hero, as for Milton, is again Satan, but even the gods are, in the end, subservient to the cold universe -

'And o'er the heads of gods and giants swung,

In patient unperturbed indifference,

The punctual planets; and the planets above,

In pride yet haughtier, marched the Milky Way' (1974 reprint p 157).

- II9. David Wevill, A Christ of the Ice-floes London 1966, 'painfully he comes'.

- II9. Francis Berry, The Iron Christ London 1938, repr. in The Galloping Centaur: Poems 1933-1951, London 1952 - the building of a Christ sculpted from gun metal on the border of Chile and Argentina prevents war between the two,

'Bit by bit emerges It,

Gun, Iron, Man, Christ.

No scattering in alarm,

Here is the Man of Iron' (1952 ed., p 58).

- I20. Jack Clemo, 'Christ in the Clay Pit', A Map of Clay London 1961;

'I see his blood

In rusty stains on pit-props, wagon-frames

Bristling with nails, not leaves ...'

- I21. Kathleen Abbott, Masks and Ikons London 1973, 'the mask conceals and leaves us questioning; the ikon reveals', meditations on the face of Christ -
 'The face is mysterious -
 how it hides, in my darkness' (p 41).
- I22. Gavin Bantock, Christ: A Poem in Twenty Six Parts, Oxford 1965. Unfortunately 'Jesus cried - in hollow bombast' (p 131) sums up this massive work.
- I23. V.H.Auden, For the Time Being, New York 1944 - the concluding line to this 'Christmas Oratorio', Advent made modern. In the 'Massacre of the Innocents' section, for example, Herod is supremely sinister because so apparently reasonable. - 'I'm a liberal. I want everyone to be happy' - a pose offset by the two poems that follow, gratuitous, willing slaughter and despair.
- I24. T.S.Eliot, 'Journey of the Magi' (1927), Complete Poems and Plays 1969 p 104. Cf. 'A Song for Simeon' for the same weary rejection of a long-willed experience which is now beyond the range of endurance - the worshipper too old, too weak - 'Let thy servant depart/having seen thy salvation' (p 106).
- I25. Geoffrey Hill, Tenebrae London 1978 -
 'Our love is what we love to have;
 our faith is in our festivals'. (p 43).
- I26. V.H.Auden, Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957, London 1966 (1969 ed p 323-38). Each canonical hour also represents human life, from birth to death, and the history of the church, from Adam's birth in 'Prime' to the ideal community of 'Lauds', 'God bless this green world temporal' (p 338).
- I27. David Jones, The Anathemata, London 1952, 2nd ed. 1955, (1972 ed. p 50). These 'fragments of an attempted writing', themselves heavily annotated by the poet himself, look increasingly impressive, particularly as critics gradually make lighter their undoubted complexities - see Agenda 5¹⁻³ (Spring/Summer 1967) and 11⁴-12¹ (Autumn/Winter 1973/4), both special issues on Jones' work, and Rene Hague, 'Myth and Mystery in the Poetry of David Jones' Agenda 15²⁻³ (Summer- Autumn 1977). It is a moot point whether Agenda has been of most help to Jones, or Jones of most help to Agenda.
- I28. See Leslie Alcock, Arthur's Britain, Harmondsworth 1971, for the literary, historical and archeological background to Arthurian studies, and Richard Barber, King Arthur in Legend and History, London 1973, for a concise study of Arthurian themes in later English literature.
- I29. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, transl. B.Stone, Harmondsworth 1959, l.721. The poem combines two distinct Celtic motifs, the beheading game and the threefold challenge, but the forest through which Gawain passes - in a rapidly telescoped narrative - is real enough, terrors recreated in Ted Hughes' Modwo, London 1967, which takes this quotation as its starting point.
- I30. See Barber p 138, 'following the fashion for Arthurian references in chivalry'

- I31. See Christopher Hicks, Tennyson, London 1972 pp264-76, quoting Henry James - 'Arthur is rather a prig' - and Algernon Swinburne's cruelly accurate jibe that it should be retitled 'Morte D'Albert or Idylls of the Prince Consort'.
- I32. T.S.Eliot, The Waste Land, lines 388-9, (See also note 41)
 'There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
 It has no windows, and the door swings'.
- I33. Geoffrey Hill, For the Unfallen, London 1959 p 20, 'Merlin', typically elegiac,
 'Arthur, Elaine, Mordred; they are all gone
 Among the rafted galleries of bone'.
- I34. Thom Gunn, The Sense of Movement London 1957, pp56-8, 'Merlin in the Cave: He speculates without a book', typically personal, 'my wants agree/in the sweet promiscuity of the bee'.
- I35. C.H.Sisson, 'In Insula Avalonia', In the Trojan Ditch: Collected Poems and Selected Translations, Manchester 1974, p 22 See Schmidt, pp269-70.
- I36. See Geoffrey Ashe, 'The Visionary Kingdom', The Quest for Arthur's Britain, London 1968, 2nd ed, 1971 p 20.
- I37. Charles Williams, 'What then is the achievement of the Grail', Arthurian Torso, ed. C.S.Lewis, London 1948, p 80 .
- I38. Charles Williams, 'The Prayers of the Pope', The Region of the Summer Stars, London 1944, rev. ed. 1950, p 60.
- I39. John Heath-Stubbs, Artorius: A heroic poem in four books and eight episodes, London 1973, 2nd revised ed. London 1973. Each section is based on an astrological sign. Cf Paul Turner, Tennyson, London 1976 pp149-69.
- I40. Artorius p 62.
- I41. John Milton, Areopagitica, 1644, quoted Ruthven p 68.
- I42. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads 1805, ed. D. Roper, London 1968. See, in particular, Preface p 21, 'Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity'.
- I43. Most notably in his cycle of plays based on Cuchulain, and his own field work collating folk-tales.
- I44. W.H.Auden, 'Paid on Both Sides', Poems, London 1930, revised ed. reprinted in Collected Longer Poems 1968. The mock-sinister action follows the bizarre Mummings pattern - the Doctor brings his patient back to life - but this 'charade' takes on political overtones. See also R.J.Tiddy, The Mummings Play Oxford 1923, repr. Chicheley 1972.
- I45. Thom Gunn, Jack Straw's Castle, London 1976, pp48-58.

- I46. Vernon Watkins, Ballad of the Mari Lwyd, London 1941, based on a symbolic, wooden horse head ceremonially paraded on the last night of the year -
 'Midnight. Midnight. Midnight. Midnight.
 Hark at the hands of the clock'.
- I47. Macpherson had some access to oral Scottish folk tradition, however bogus his 'discovery' of Ossian - see Ruthven p 67.
- I48. William Wordsworth, Ecclesiastical Sonnets 3, 'Trepidation of the Druids' -
 'Portending ruin to each baleful rite
 That, in the lapse of ages, hath crept o'er
 Diluvian truths and patriochal lore'.
- I49. Jacob Bryant New System...of Ancient Mythology, London 1774-6, quoted Ruthven p 68. Greek myth is not original but derived/stolen from the Babylonians.
- I50. Thomas Gray praised the Welsh poet William Mason (Ruthven p 68) for a 'new mythology peculiar to the Druid superstition and not borrowed of the Greeks'
- I51. Blake again believed that Britain was the ancient fount of civilization (see Ruthven pp 68-70) and this was reflected in his own confused, often self-contradictory myth-system; See S.Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary: the Ideas and Symbols of William Blake, London 1973. Nevertheless, Blake was in many ways profoundly unmythical. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 'the Ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses', but such innocent myth-making was turned by the Priesthood into a rigid system -
 'Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
 And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.
 Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast'.
- I52. Charles Doughty, The Dawn in Britain, London 1906, VI 189-190.
- I53. Basil Bunting, Briggflatts, London 1966, 2nd (reset) ed. p 13. Bloodaxe is made the presiding deity of old Northumbria much as Offa is of Mercia.
- I54. D.M.Thomas, Logan Stone London 1971 (pages unnumbered).
- I55. Jeremy Hooker, Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant, London 1974. A note on the giant p 52, 'awareness of chalk and flint coincides with my earliest impressions'.
- I56. Jeremy Hooker, Solent Shore, Manchester 1978 p 16, 'Tertiary Song'.
- I57. Roy Fisher, 'City', Collected Poems 1968, London 1979 p 27. The city here is, of course, Birmingham - victim of both war and town planning.
- I58. For a more charitable view of the influence of Olson's Maximus Poems - based on a close identification with the fishing village of Gloucester, Mass. - see Nathaniel Tarn, 'World Wide Open', International Times, 28 June 1968.
- I59. Hugh Macdiarmid, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, London 1926.
- I60. John Montague, The Rough Field, Dublin 1972, p 15.

- I61. Jeremy Hooker, Solent Shore p 29, 'Floating-Bridge';
Is it, perhaps, the sludge
of nostalgia, or the unseen
seen too narrowly'.
- I62. Geoffrey Chaucer, The Marchantes Tale lines II8-130. See [unclear] ed.
- I63. Christopher Marlowe, Hero and Leander sestiad II, lines 297-8. (See note I9).
- I64. John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 6, l.447, Book I l.422.
- I65. Edmund Spenser, Prothalamion lines 42-5.
- I66. Christopher Marlowe, 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' line 10 (Orgel p211)
- I67. Sir Walter Raleigh, 'The Nymph's Reply' line 16. (Orgel p 212).
- I68. Andrew Marvell, 'The Nymph complaining for the death of her Faun', The Metaphysical Poets, ed. H. Gardner, Harmondsworth 1957, pp247 - 250.
'I have a Garden of my own
But with Roses over grown
And Lillies, that you would it guess
To be a little Wilderness'. (p 249).
- I69. Andrew Marvell, 'The Garden', *ibid* p 256. - wilderness no more.
- I70. Alexander Pope, An Essay on Criticism line 94 -
'Hear how learned Greece her useful rules indites,
When to repress, and when indulge our flights;
High on Parnassus' top her sons she showed,
And pointed out those arduous paths they trod'.
- I71. Alexander Pope, The Dunciad Book I lines 17-8.
'Still her old empire to restore she tries,
For, born a goddess, Dulness never dies'.
- I72. Alexander Pope, The Rape of the Lock. See Ruthven p 58, a poem which 'for all its superficial hostility to myths and their makers, depends heavily upon the existence of a reading-public well-acquainted with classical mythology'.
- I73. Percy Bysshe Shelley, Hellas lines 11-12; 'A brighter Hellas rears its mountains/from waves serener far' (lines 7-8).
- I74. John Keats, '(Epistle) To George Felton Matthew', Poetical Works ed. H. Garrod, London 1956 p 23 -
'... I am oft in doubt whether at all
I shall again see Phoebus in the morning:
Or flush'd Aurora in the roseate dawning!' (lines 20-22).
- I75. John Keats, 'The Fall of Hyperion' Canto I, line 288, Works p 410.

- I76. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Idylls of the King, closing lines of 'The Passing of Arthur', darkness yielding to a new dawn. Arthur's funeral barge passes
 'Down that long water opening on the deep
 Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
 From less to less, and vanish into light,
 And the new sun rose bringing the new year'.
- I77. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Lotus Eaters'.
- I78. Algernon Swinburne, 'In memory of Charles Baudelaire' stanza I5, lines 4-7 -
 'That thing transformed which was the Cytherean,
 With lips that lost their Grecian laugh divine
 Long since, and face no more called Erycine,
 A ghost, a bitter and luxurious god'.
- I79. William Blake, 'To the Muses', Poetical Sketches (lines I5-I6).
- I80. Arthur Hugh Clough, Amours du Voyage, introduction to Canto II. Ironically, Matthew Arnold's pastoral lament for Clough, Thyrsis, reveals just such a hardening into cliché (lines 97-98);
 'She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain,
 But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard'.
- I81. Wilfred Owen, 'Antaeus: A Fragment', Collected Poems, ed. C. Day Lewis, London 1963 p I20.
- I82. 'Inspection', Works p 79;
 "Blood's dirt", he laughed, looking away
 Far off to where his wound had bled
 And almost merged for ever into clay'. (lines 9-II).
- I83. See Al Alvarez, 'The New Poetry or Beyond the Gentility Principle', preface to The New Poetry ed. Alvarez, Harmondsworth 1962, arguing cogently for a more committed poetry - 'it is hard to live in an age of psychoanalysis and feel oneself wholly detached from the dominant public savagery' 1966 ed. p27. See also 'Introduction' to Poetry of the Committed Individual: A Stand Anthology of Poetry, Harmondsworth 1973, ed. Jon Silkin.
- I84. See Terry Eagleton, 'Myth and History in Recent Poetry', British Poetry Since 1960: A Critical Survey ed. M. Schmidt and G. Lindop, Oxford 1972, pp 233-239.
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CHAPTER TWO.

LEGEND AS ARCHETYPE:

THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY.

In the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Irish legend is used as an archetype of tribal violence and revenge, unchanged from Celtic pre-history to the present 'Troubles'. This is to explain, not condone, such willed brutality, the poet as archeologist. Indeed, in an illuminating account of his training as a writer¹, Heaney expands on the equation between farm work and literary creation which underlies much of his early work. This is expressed most blatantly in 'Digging' which (significantly) opens his first full collection Death of a Naturalist² - an ironic title in retrospect, for Heaney's response to the natural world deepens rather than atrophies in later poems. Indeed, Heaney sees his work as a kind of expiation for the poet's escape from 'the earth of physical labour to the heaven of education'³, and a recreation of the former in terms of the latter. Legend is reborn through craft (the careful delineation of archetype), the pen proves as mighty as the spade.

'Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it'⁴.

The effect of this dichotomy between manual work and the watchful intellect lies at the centre of Heaney's early poetry, and to some extent enervates it. This attempt to describe the world in a flurry of metaphors and tropes gives his more facile poems, as even his most convincing champion has noted, a kind of showiness -

'an axiomatic quality that is perilously close to being self-defeating;
they can even in cumulation constitute their own kind of precosity'⁵.

The same critic has also detected an unpleasant note of violence - the pen in 'Digging' also rests 'snug as a gun', an over-emphatic distinction is drawn in 'The Early Purges' between the soft town and the realistic country. This seems, in turn, to mirror a similar division within the poet, and is thus unconvincing in the brutality - moral and linguistic - of its slick conclusion.

'Prevention of cruelty' talk cuts ice in town
Where they consider death unnatural
But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down'⁶.

Heaney's early facility, which was most noticed by early reviewers, can now be seen to be underlaid by a sense of unease and reigned-in violence, a sensitivity to the disturbances of modern Ireland - sectarian, social, heir to both the legends and massacres of the past. Heaney, increasingly aware of his own duplicity, is later to make this archetype of violence his own, a territory 'for the dispossessed'.

In Death of a Naturalist this sense of unease is learnt from the natural world - the spade again instructing the pen - the title poem tracing the progress from childhood certainties, 'the warm thick slobber/of frogspawn', to adult disillusion and fear, these tadpoles become 'great slime kings ... gathered there for vengeance'. This threat seems almost sexual - 'obscene threats', 'if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it' - and this fascination for the sinister continues in 'The Bârn' - 'mouse-grey', 'cobwebs clogging up your lungs' the bright eyes of bats - the young poet himself chaff, prey for predators,

'I lay face-down to shun the fear above.

The two-lugged sacks moved in like great blind rats'⁸.

In 'An Advancement of Learning' these fears are faced direct, 'with deliberate, thrilled care', and thus defeated, the rat here (in a reversal of the process in 'Death of a Naturalist') reduced, through a poet's close observance, from terror to something pathetic, 'cold, wet-furred, small-clawed'. Man's interaction with Nature is similarly ambivalent, alchemically turning milk into the 'gilded gravel' of butter in 'Churning Day' but, in 'Blackberry-Picking' turning 'summer's blood', through picking, into a 'rat-grey fungus'. The process is beyond the poet's redemption, 'each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not'. 'Dawn Shoot' extends this destructiveness to a more deliberate killing, the careful slaughter of a snipe, not for profit but sport, a kind of warning,

'The ones that slipped back when the all clear got round

Would be the first to examine him'⁹.

In 'Turkeys Observed' these more domesticated birds are also seen in death but 'cowering', retaining none 'of the smelly majesty of living', their mortality expected even in life and now human fodder, ranged in 'cold squadrons' ready for Christmas. This is the same kind of natural, enforced death accepted in 'The Early Purges', but just as that, unconsciously perhaps, predicted future civil slaughter here the turkeys resemble later human victims, 'just another poor forked thing'. More pregnant with life, conversely, is the crop gathered in 'At a Potato Digging', 'live skulls, blind-eyed', gathered as if in religious awe - 'processional stooping', 'homage to the famine god', a seasonal altar' - and given 'libations of cold tea', sacrifices of crusts.

These accidental offerings are homage to the past, for 'live skulls, blind-eyed' serves also to describe those victims of famine when 'hope rotted like a marrow',

'A people hungering from birth,
grubbing like plants, in the bitch earth'¹⁰.

This 'running sore' of history is brought chillingly to life in 'For the Commander of the Eliza' where, again, 'living skulls' shock into compassion, 'gaping mouths and eyes/bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills', victims reduced to animality 'like a flock of starving gulls'. Official intolerance here presages a future 'violent and without hope', and unease is intensified by two cameos of religious bigotry - the Protestant in 'Dock', 'blunt as a Celtic cross', who clamps speech 'in the lips vice' and makes his faith into 'mosaic imperatives' contrasted with 'Poor Women in a City Church', Catholics whose 'beeswax brows' resemble the candles they light, symbols of the deadening ritual to which they kneel. This tacitly made comparison, stern intolerance and feeble prostration, leads inexorably to future conflict.

Death of a Naturalist is not all so negative, however - it also records everyday epiphanies (to reach their apogee much later in Stations), moments of sudden illumination in either life or art which symbolise a wider continuum. 'The Diviner', for example, discerns 'the pluck of water' through his 'green aerial', a homing in on the 'secret stations' of earth echoed in 'Gravities'. Here, Joyce's yearnings toward Ireland, 'blinding in Paris', are seen as a deep-rooted instinct held in common with lovers who 're-enter the native port of their embrace', like the poet's eye in 'Waterfall' a motionless point in a turning world which 'yet records the motion standing still' (motion controlled, the 'Cow in Calf' whose heats and calves 'keep coming and going', the 'Trout' which ramrods the current in a 'volley of cold blood'). Art should be as precise as the best crafts, the 'curt cuts' of the spade's 'bright edge' so admired in 'Digging' reproduced in 'In Small Townlands' as a painter's eye for detail,

'The splintered lights slice like a spade
That strips the land of fuzz and blotch,
Pares clean as bone'¹¹.

Similarly, 'Synge on Aran' celebrates that writer's truth to the hardships of Irish peasant life, his 'nib filed on a salt wind/and dipped in the keening sea'.

Conversely, in 'Saint Francis and the Birds', Francis's best poem is his preaching to the birds, art as action, 'his argument true, his tone light'. Art must challenge not palliate, like Beethoven's concerto in 'The Play Way', a snare to trip children 'to fall into themselves unknowingly', and unlike the 'narcotic strumming' of 'The Folk Singers', prostituting folk tradition so that 'pale love' is 'rouged for the street'. These visions require hard work to achieve their mysteries, as does the keeping pure of this

'Numb passion, pearled in the shy
Shell of a country love'¹².

Heaney's own love poems concur. 'Poem' (addressed to his wife Marie) takes up the ever-present digging metaphor to compare himself as a child, his mud walls always washed away 'before the rising autumn rain' with his adult self,

'Within new limits now, arrange the world
Within our walls, within our golden ring'¹³.

In 'Honeymoon Flight' this new arranging is implicitly compared to the plane hanging 'miraculous' in air, 'travellers, at this point, can only trust', while 'Lovers on Aran' compares love to the meeting of earth and water, 'sea broke on land to full identity'. Similarly, in 'Valediction', loss causes discord in nature, 'need breaks on my strand', while the cautious lovers in 'Twice Shy' are held as 'hawk and prey apart. Heaney's imagery approaches the metaphysical, emotion frozen into tropes drawn either from craftwork - in 'Scaffolding' the lovers, like 'masons', let old bridges fall 'confident that we have built our wall' - or the natural world - as in 'Storm on the Island', where this new house faces (partly symbolic) tempest,

'We are bombarded by the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear'¹⁴.

This sense of love, and the historical nexus which surrounds it, extends to the poet's own family. 'Ancestral Photograph' (more tightly rhymed and constructed than Heaney's usual technique - in which art tries to disguise itself) closes this 'chapter of our chronicle'. Heaney's great-uncle 'begins to fade/and must come down', both his portrait relegated from bedroom wall to the attic - repository of forgotten family history and the legends of the past -

— and his memory consigned to history. These crafts have been passed on, from uncle to nephew, father to son - Heaney himself learnt them 'twenty years ago' herding cattle to the fair - but they are now atrophying with progress,

'No room for dealers if the farmers shopped
Like housewives at an auction room ... '15.

Such losses, the accumulated folk wisdom of previous generations, are important, even if revealed in apparently trivial asides - as in 'Digging', 'by God, the old man could handle a spade/just like his old man'. They are, however, often swallowed up in ceremony, just as, in 'Mid-Term Break', the young Heaney fails to realize the tragedy of his younger brother's death until the pathos of the final line, 'a four foot box, a foot for every year'. Tradition and family can, nevertheless, stifle, rather than enrich, the future and it is this sense of imprisonment that underlies 'Follower', the ploughing motif and his father's accumulated skill turned, now, into a failure to exercise the past in order to properly live the present. Heaney once walked in his father's 'broad shadow',

'..... but to-day
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me and will not go away'16.

This theme of escape from his father and all that he represents - the soil, Irish tradition, responsibility, the forces of the past - could well be seen as Heaney's most urgent, though hidden, subject in Death of a Naturalist, and this ghost is finally exorcised in the uncollected 'Boy driving his Father to Confession', a poem, for someone as 'tight-lipped' as Heaney, of surprising self-revelation. This celebrates the four occasions on which the poet has 'found chinks in the paternal mail/to find you lost like me'. The last of these follows the father's own attempt to similarly come to terms with God, thus revealing his own vulnerability (bracing himself for a 'confession' similar to that made by Heaney in writing this poem) and thus becomes approachable.

'You grunt, and slam the door. I watch another
Who gropes as awkwardly to know his father'17.

With this relationship clarified and settled, the poet is free to assess, in a more detached way, his similarly inescapable and deep rooted ties with his Irish heritage, digging, albeit still with the pen not the spade, into his own

culture, using poetry as a means of forcing a 'door into the dark'.

Door into the Dark itself, Heaney's second collection, is more unified, both by a linear development of subject and thought - all subsequent books until Field Work are increasingly attempts at the epic - and a concentration on certain key images - allied to the collection's underlying themes; Ireland's darkness, fishing for meaning, lough water as a means of expression. The morals drawn are less pat than in Death of a Naturalist, the descriptions more carefully controlled, the poems more resonant, and the mysteries of the natural world, again often in themselves terrifying, shade gradually into the legendary (the archetype, again, of violence). This last process is best traced in the opening dozen poems. 'Night Piece' begins Door into the Dark with a description of dark and terror, the nightmare horse a symbol for the 'dull pounding' of another's pain, the sectarian strife of Northern Ireland - 'must you know it again?'. In 'Gone', this horse has been taken away, but its very absence is still dominant, 'leaving this stable unmade'. Its discarded harness - like a dead man's clothes - is a sad testimony to life frozen in death, fever brought to the chill of the grave (an image of archetypal, legendary decline).

'The sweaty twist of the bellyband
Was stiffened, cold in the hand'¹⁸.

Ireland is hinted at in this deserted stable, holding dim memorials to sharp suffering - 'his hot reek is lost/the place is old in his must' - and such archetypal slaughter is rehearsed in 'Dream', a further nightmare 'before I woke'. A dream of harvesting, 'hacking a stalk/thick as a telegraph pole', becomes suddenly a tribal memory of ritual beheading (to be continued in North), 'the next stroke/found a man's head under the hook'. The impassive skill of this sacrifice - 'I heard the steel stop/in the bone of the brow' - continues into the 'business-like conception' of 'The Outlaw'. Kelly's bull creates a life with 'the unfussy ease of a good tradesman', as much part of native fertility as the 'shaggy' catkins in the lane. Nevertheless, the bull is 'unlicensed', the outlaw of the title, and derives both his ease and virility from the mysteries of night and the natural order, 'who, in his own time, resumed the dark, the straw'. It is this hidden shrine dark with secrecy - whether stable, nightmare or shed - which Heaney's curiosity settles on for the rest of Door into the Dark, an image for the timelessness of legend, the archetype of lost Ireland.

'The Forge' presents this 'door into the dark' in another guise, the craft of the village blacksmith recalling less troubled times, the 'clatter of hoofs' (horses again as spirits of the past) set against modern traffic 'flashing in rows'. The blacksmith takes on the brusque efficiency of Kelly's bull - he 'grunts', 'expends himself in shape and music' - as well as its secrecy, his anvil an 'altar' to ancient mysteries, 'set there immoveable'. Craftwork again redeems the present through the wisdom of the past in 'Thatcher'. Here the workman's apparent tardiness - 'it seemed he spent the morning warming up' - belies the same casual efficiency leading to magic, alchemical gold out of straw,

'He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together
Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
And left them gaping at his Midas touch'¹⁹.

The thatcher here is a representative of the poet through his quiet ordering, transforming skill into art, just as the child/poet of the earlier 'Personal Helicon' defined his own myths, a 'big-eyed Narcissus' who made rhymes in order to 'see myself, to set the darkness echoing'. If that poem seemed to desert the natural world of the collection, Death of a Naturalist, which it concluded - an apparent farewell to both sinister rats and lode-bearing wells - 'The Peninsular' opens up this subject matter again, here used not to (literally) reflect the poet but explore his heritage, 'you're in the dark again'. Nature bequeathes an abiding image of the meeting of land, sky and sea, a mystic encounter which provides Heaney with a new lack of meaning, 'nothing to say'

'Except that now you will encode all landscapes
By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,
Water and ground in their extremity'²⁰.

'In Gallarus Oratory' uses this insight to unlock the mystery of an ancient Christian site which combines womb-like security - a 'turfstack', the 'heart of the globe' - with the darkness of the past - 'a core of old dark walled up with stone' filled with the 'black weight' of the monks' breathing - to create a kind of life-in-death, death-in-life, 'founded there like heroes in a barrow'. These packed surroundings seem to reduce man - 'no worshipper/could leap up to his God off this floor' - but conversely, on leaving them, Nature itself is imbued with religious ceremony, 'the sea a conser and the grass a flame'.

As best befits this underlying sense of dark, Irish myth is seen throughout Heaney's work as more brutal and chilling than the southern pantheons, a 'sterner' system deriving from ancient hardship and slaughter. In 'Girls Bathing, Galway 1965', woman is seen not as 'milk-limbed Venus' but 'a pirate queen in battle clothes', an archetype enduring as 'the years/shuttle through space invisibly' and enmeshed 'in fear and sin'. What is redeeming in this myth is the very ordinariness of its mysteries - earlier seen in domestic animals, craftwork, ruins - and open sexuality, 'so Venus comes, matter of fact'. Such fertility is revived, ironically, in 'Requiem for the Croppies', their great coat pockets 'full of barley' which seeds long after these rebels are corpses, slaughtered in pitched battle by the English, 'shaking scythes at cannon'. In their death these croppies reinvigorate Ireland, both literally and mythically, precursors of 'new tactics' to set free a nation -

'They buried us without shroud or coffin

And in August the barley grew up out of the grave'²¹.

Landscape has indeed been mythologised into meaning, history into legend.

The rest of Door into the Dark falls, fairly naturally, into three parts. These deal, in turn, with love, the natural world and the past, all both presented for their own sake and yet given added significance through their context, close description made a function of symbolism. 'Rite of Spring', for example, views the freeing of a frozen water pump, 'ice founding itself/upon iron', (in a somewhat chancy sexual metaphor) as a kind of fertility ritual, 'her entrance was wet, and she came'. 'Undine' again presents love obliquely, the sexual act reflected in the diverting of a stream, which here expresses its devotion. It is mythologised as an undine, a female water spirit - 'disrobed', 'dispersing myself for love' and giving in return 'subtle increase and reflection' - and this coupling brings fertility, 'human, warmed to him'. 'The Wife's Tale' continues this idea of woman as provider (water to man's earth - 'as proud as if he were the land itself'), bringing refreshments for the harvesters and admiring their work, linked to the timeless process of the past, sustenance as warfare -

'... forks were stuck at angles in the ground

As javelins might mark lost battlefields'²².

The wife's approval and her provision of food seem, again, sexual at base, as the-thresher's double-entendre well indicates - 'I declare a woman could lay out a field/though boys like us have little call for cloths'. - and the men now rest like exhausted lovers, 'spread out, unbuttoned, grateful, under the trees'. Such memorials of fertility, both ploughing and seed-time, lead neatly into three poems which deal primarily with pregnancy. 'Mother' presents this in terms of repetitious, wearying farmwork. The wife's duties - priming the pump (released in 'Rite of Spring'), feeding the cows, repairing the gate which 'does not jingle for joy anymore - match the exertions of her unborn son - 'this plunger inside me', 'young calf/gone wild on a rope', a 'gate for myself' which is frayed by bad weather. Inner and outer realities are both subject to disillusion, a chill wind which 'stuffs air down my throat'. 'Cana Revisited' views conception instead as a miracle, not water into wine but 'the bone-hooped womb, rising like yeast', a 'consecration' which is extraordinary because so ordinary, 'wondrous (being their own)'. 'Elegy for a Still-Born Child' follows hope with despair, romance with tragedy, a return to the genuine pathos of 'Mid-Term Break',

'A wreath of small clothes, a memorial pram,
And parents reaching for a phantom limb'²³.

This sadness continues into 'Victorian Guitar', its inscription 'more like the plate on a coffin', and the guitar represents Louisa's freedom before marriage, 'trim as a girl in stays'. Such licence is forbidden in wedlock; - 'John Charles did not hold with fingering' - but this forsaken sexuality is continued (in musical terms) by the poet, 'the man who has it now/is giving it the time of its life'. This section of love poems, of different kinds but all allied to art or nature, concludes on a quieter note with 'Night Drive'. Heaney celebrates 'the smells of ordinariness' made new, a triumphal progress - 'each place granting its name's fulfillment' - as the lights of combine, forest fire and cafés in turn go out until love is echoed in geography, a renewal of (transformed) ordinariness, where 'Italy/laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere'. Love is a resolution of the tensions and discoveries of the outside world, and these ambitious poems look forward to the more complex harmonies of 'A Lough Neagh Sequence', from family legend to those of the tribe.

The major themes of 'A Lough Neagh Sequence' have already been prepared for. 'The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon' presented fishing as a mutual process, 'we're both annihilated on the fly', both coming 'to grief through hunger' and adherence to their mutual roles, hunted and hunter, victim and executioner -

'You can't resist a gullet full of steel.
I will turn home fish-smelling, scaly',²⁴.

In 'Elegy for a Still Born Child', the mother is like a fishing rod whose catch has got away, 'an empty creel/unlearning the intimate nudge and pull', the dead child a 'collapsed'sphere', fallen 'shooting star', ~~an~~ 'evicted world'. Such thoughts -- 'birth of death, exhumation of death' - characterise 'lonely journeys' over bare roads, the same progress into meaning as in 'The Peninsula';

'Past mountain fields, full to the brim with cloud,
White waves riding home on a wintry lough',²⁵.

'At Ardboe Point' is set right on this 'lough shore', placing love - 'to kiss between sheets' - in its natural context, the 'green pollen' of mosquitoes another form of fertility, both doomed and a revelation of the outside world,

'Choirs, dying through
Their own live empyrean, troublesome only
As the last veil on a dancer',²⁶.

This 'smoke of flies' is not a plague but a last summoning of innocence - 'shattering daintily/against the windscreen' - and 'Relic of Memory' sees lough water as preserving such fragility, helping to 'incarcerate ghosts/of sap and season'. This 'drowning love' characterises 'A Lough Neagh Sequence' itself, dedicated 'for the fisherman', Heaney's first extended treatment of local legend.

'Up the Shore', section I of the sequence, emphasises both the dangers of this coastal eel fishing (the sequence's ostensible subject) - 'the lough will claim a victim every year' - and its craft, 'there is a sense of fair play in the game'. The same quality that 'hardens wood to stone' in the lough hardens the fishermen who gain their livelihood from it, eschewing modern fishing methods and not learning to swim so that 'we'll be the quicker going down' if capsized. The past is preserved here, both through such rituals and as geography, the lough itself 'the scar left by the Isle of Man', a long drowned town now

'sunk beneath its water'. Section 2, 'Beyond Sargasso', begins the eel's long migration 'half-way/across the Atlantic', a progress 'sure/as the satellite's insinuating pull' (its difficulty mirrored by the short abrupt lines employed here), the eel a 'muscle icicle/that melts itself longer/and fatter'. This procreation takes place in the darkness earlier emphasised, for night both protects and brings to fertility, delivering 'him hungering/down each undulation'. The third section, 'Bait', recalls the 'drainmaker's spade' of 'Beyond Sargasso', digging into the silt, and, more distantly, an earlier kind of tempting,

'Walton thought garden worms, perfumed
By oil crushed from dark ivy berries
The lure that took you best'²⁷.

Here there is no need for such sophistication, ~~the night~~ again the time for these raiders, 'the lamp's beam their prow and compass', patience (as for the thatcher) and sexuality (as for the pump) combined into a craft, 'draw steady and he'll come'. Having caught these worms - innocent ventilators of the ground/making the globe a perfect fit' - as 'garland for the bay', this bait must be laid, a process described in section 4, 'Setting'. Again 'indifferent skill' is celebrated, mingled with guile - the fishing line 'out of sight and out of mind', the 'bouquet of small hooks' - and ritual - the circling gulls 'responsive acolytes' to whom is made sacrifice the last of the 'chopped worms', 'good riddance, earthy shower'. The crew 'pursue the work in hand as destiny', a sense of tradition, followed for its own sake, that continues in the fifth section, 'Lifting',

'And when did this begin?
This morning, last year, when the lough first spawned?
The crews will answer, 'Once the season's in''²⁸.

Earth and water are again combined, the 'filament of smut' which clings to the fishing line, while the dying eels, 'the hook left in gill or gum', knit themselves into a Celtic whorl, a 'knot of back and pewter belly/that stays continuously one', as intricate as the boats' wakes, 'enwound as the catch', both fishermen and eels 'sucked home like lubrication'. This instinctual home-coming is examined further in 'The Return', section six, the eel 'following/whim deliberately', providing

'its own taper and light
through the weltering dark'²⁹.

The eel conquers both dark and earth - 'at sea in grass', crossing the land by

'new trenches, sunk pipes, swamps, running streams, the lough' - and passes back into the ocean 'down in her origins', scattering her young, 'the current carries aslicks of orphaned spawn'. Section 7, 'Vision', confirms childhood fears, the ~~the~~ threat that hair lice, if unchecked, would 'gang up/into a mealy rope/and drag him ... down to the water' is revived by seeing these eels move across grass alike 'hatched fears'. Nightmare is brought to life, the field seeming to move in a 'jellied road', a monstrous vision of the various kinds of circularity - traditional, supernatural ('a victim every year') - the whole sequence celebrates,

'Phosphorescence, sinewed slime
continued at his feet. Time
confirmed the horrid cable'³⁰.

The remaining poems move further into landscape and the past. 'The Given Note' derives a kind of folk culture from the elements, 'spirit music' which is learnt from the wind and, through art, 'rephrases itself into air', while 'The Plantation' makes nature itself magical, 'ghosting your bearings/improvising charmed rings' and thus teaching man 'how to lose yourself' and thus become whole 'witch,/Hansel and Gretel in one'. 'Whinlands' stresses the connection between ~~these~~ natural elements and the preservation of the past, the sticks which, even ~~after~~ fire 'remain like bone, charred horn', take on a 'stunted dry richness' ~~which~~ persists near (and over) signs of earlier human habitation, 'flintbed and ~~battlefield~~'. Similarly, 'Shoreline' celebrates the 'black locks' of Ireland, its rocks 'forgotten like sentries' but still remembering earlier invaders, Danes, 'black hawk bent on the sail', 'chinking Normans' and 'currachs hopping high', 'hissing submissions' of the sea. 'Bann Clay' again preserves the past, a 'clutch of Mesolithic/flints' testimony to the age of this clay 'sunk for centuries' and underrunning the valley, a 'smooth weight' which, like tradition, 'holds and gluts'. The final poem, 'Bogland', fired by Glob's research³¹, 'bears testimony to the preservative powers of Irish peat, the 'cyclops' eye/of a tarn' which keeps intact the past - butter, the Great Elk, tradition - a history which seems bottomless, 'every layer they strip/seems camped on before'. Like these peat diggers, Heaney vows to use his spade of poetry to dig further in this dark,

'Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards'³².

In pre-history and legend, Heaney has discovered his own 'door into the dark', able at last to revivify himself from these traditional sources and thus 're-echo our own speech in formal and surprising arrangements'³³. Wintering Out³⁴, his third collection, shows the benefits of this return to the past. In retrospect, its partial, though not fully realized, attempt at thematic unity proves a crucial transitional phase between Heaney's early mastery of local (in both senses) detail and the rich fullness of North. Both works are divided into two sections, twin aspects of an archetypal violence. The first part deals with Irish legend and history, notably linguistic, and their interaction with the Northern landscape; the second part uses such achieved knowledge to explore the difficulties of the present, personal and political. These latter, the 'Troubles' of virtual civil war - always the cruellest of all - are referred to in the italicised poem³⁵ which prefaces Wintering Out; their only direct evocation in that collection. An internee camp, unreal and yet undeniable, 'a bad dream with no sound', serves as a metaphor for Ulster. The 'little destiny' - the bitter archetype of Irish legend - that has evolved such hatred is to be further traced in North. Whether this refusal to face violence direct but to refract it through folklore, through personal escape - both collections end with the poet in exile - is legitimate contemplation or a shying away will be discussed later. As a brooding presence offstage, legend resurgent, 'the 'Troubles' have certainly lent his poetry urgency and authenticity'³⁶.

The opening poems of Part One of Wintering Out evoke the history and natural beneficence of Ireland, its fruitfulness almost a miracle, 'multiple as loaves and fishes'³⁷. In 'Fodder', the poet states his reliance on this to 'comfort and provide security, 'to bed the stall'. This fodder is also a symbol for the past - it is 'last summer's - and, in the first of many linguistic references and puns; represents a search for fatherhood, 'or, as we said/fother'. The past is rejected in 'Bog Oak', however, where the cart track leads back not to legend and its archetypes - 'cutter of mistletoe'³⁸ - but to the fanciful 'geniuses' of place invented by the English poet Spenser and the false culture that he helped import, 'towards watercress and carrion'³⁹. More genuine are the 'mound-dwellers' of 'Anahorish', a place name from the poet's childhood which now evokes both his rural past - men dispersing ice, as in 'Rite of Spring' - and the figures of legend, 'waist-deep in

mist'⁴⁰. 'Servant Boy' returns to the central image of farmwork set out in 'Fodder' a word repeated here, and sets it in a strange limbo between present and past. The boy comes 'swinging a hurricane-lamp' but also is described first-footing (a New Year's Day ceremony) the 'back doors of the little barons'; he is 'impenitent' yet brings fertility, 'carrying the warm eggs'⁴¹. An even more direct analogy between past and present is made in 'The Last Mummer'. Again symbolically coming 'out of the fog'⁴², this dying example of primitive folk tradition is as ambivalent as the figures in 'Anghorish', and a similar mixture of the mysterious and the sinister. The poem continues the New Year ceremonies - 'again an old year dies'⁴³ - and this 'fabulous' ritual represents both the 'taboos' of Ireland and a way to avoid, or at least sidestep, its native violence, the archetype of slaughter;

'picking a nice way through
the long toils of blood'⁴⁴.

The mummers disappear back into darkness and dream, their ancient ritual drama of 'St. George, Beelzebub and Jack Straw'⁴⁵ having once again fulfilled its original purpose, that of fertility rite - the eternity of legend - and having thus

'untousled a first dewy path
into the summer grazing'⁴⁶.

'Land' pursues this sense of remote ancestry in terms of the earth itself, exploring the 'dark tracks' of the previous poem, while anticipation of coming Spring is heightened by the appearance of 'shifting hares'. Heaney opens up his own 'right-of-way' both to his native fields and to his ancestral past. He raises a cairn in its memory, and in commemoration of his own desertion of the land - 'I was ready to go anywhere'⁴⁷. The poem itself becomes a kind of folk-offering, a token scarecrow to frighten away marauders, itself a symbol of over-abundant fertility,

'a woman of old wet leaves,
rush-bands and thatcher's scollops'⁴⁸.

However, the poet comes instead to identify with the wild hares, and finds himself 'snared' too, presumably by the toils of the past, 'swinging an ear-ring of sharp wire'⁴⁹. Irish historical tradition, the way of violence, is not so easily escaped.

The next group of poems traces this history more carefully through one of its most sensitive monitors, the Irish dialect, a linguistic pressure-gauge used to even more effect in North. 'Gifts of Rain', the first of this group, traces this

'shared calling of blood'⁵⁰ in the name of his local river, the Moyola, 'breathing its mists/through vowels and history'⁵¹. Continuing the water/language motif of 'Anahorish', the poem traces the coming of spring and fertility invoked by the Mummers. Like the 'still mammal' - presumably an otter, which exists half in water, half on land - which 'fords his life by soundings'⁵² or the farm worker 'wading' his flooded fields whose arms 'grope the cropping lands'⁵³, the poet explores afresh his native landscape. Earth and river similarly combine to a strange rich fertility, 'a flower of mud-water'. These rains again evoke the archetype of past,

'Soft voices of the dead
are whispering by the shore'⁵⁴,

and Heaney questions, for the future's sake, the need for such excess. Section iv answers these doubts in terms of linguistics. 'The tawny guttural water/spells itself'⁵⁵, and Moyola combines sound and meaning, place and name, 'bedding the localities in the utterance'. This flooding is seen as almost sexual; in a typically bold metaphor, 'the 'mating call' of the river 'pleasures' Dives, a biblical name for the rich natural soil of Ireland, 'hoarder of common ground'. In 'Toome', exploration of language is seen as a kind of prospecting, bringing to light the 'soft blastings' of Ireland's tribal past, a mingling of violence, ancient culture, art and trade;

'loams, flints, musket-balls,
fragmented ware,
torcs and fish-bones'⁵⁶.

Sifting through Ireland's 'alluvial mud', however, proves treacherous, for suddenly it gives way beneath the explorer, earth combines with water not for fertility but 'bogwater'. This soggy atmosphere continues in 'Broagh', again set between earth and water - riverbank, ford and 'garden mould'. A heelmark in this wet ground can represent 'the black O/in Broagh' just as its sound echoes the 'low tattoo' of rain. This very native sound helps define the true Irishman, as a kind of initiation test, for the shower ends suddenly, just like 'broagh' with its final syllable, a

'gh the strangers found
difficult to manage'⁵⁷.

'Oracle' turns such listening into a close identification with the natural processes. A child, presumably the poet, hides in the trunk of a willow; when called he replies as if part of the tree himself, in this a kind of boy Diana - 'oracle' of the sacred

wood⁵⁸ - 'lobe and larynx/of the mossy places'⁵⁹, and their spokesman, their own 'listening familiar'. This integral tie between the land and its native inhabitants is made more explicit in 'The Backward Look'. Here the disappearance of the old way of life is symbolised by the extinction - in Ireland at least - of the wild snipe, its cry being transformed 'into dialect/into variants' just as its flight pattern represents the analogous ^{fall} of the Irish language (archetype of dissolution).

'A stagger in air
as if a language
failed ...'⁶⁰.

This extinction is, significantly, due to the gun; the 'sniper's eyrie' watches the bird's last flight over 'twilit earthworks' and other vestiges of primitive culture. Just as Irish has been subjugated by English, so the snipe too is now kept alive only in folk memory, 'the combs/of a fieldworker's archive'⁶¹. 'Traditions' explores this linguistic defeat more directly, again - as in 'Gifts of Rain' - through a sexual metaphor with overtones of compulsion, less pleasant here, nearer to rape.

'Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition'⁶².

The articulation of this language decays ('uvula' continuing the perhaps overtly technical anatomy of the palate traced in 'Toome' and 'Oracle') just as did the worship of Brigid, pagan goddess of fertility⁶³. Sexual submission is complete, custom 'beds us down' into Britain. Ironically, the 'Elizabethan English' which represents this enslavement is itself far purer, 'correct Shakespearean' than the 'furled consonants' of its modern equivalent in England. Similarly, earlier doubts as to the identity of the Irish as either illiterate, half-mad or, prophetically, blood-thirsty - 'anatomies of death' - are answered by Bloom, archetypal Odysseus and wandering Jew in Joyce's Ulysses⁶⁴ in his affirmation of Irish nationhood.

'... 'Ireland', said Bloom,
'I was born here, Ireland'⁶⁵.

'A New Song' reinforces such optimism by stressing the positive aspects of the linguistic sensitivity displayed in the preceding poems, as well as gathering together some of their most important motifs. In the first poem in Wintering Out to express real affection, the poet meets 'a girl from Derrygarve', but it is the place not the girl, which inspires love. The 'lost potent musk' of this name recalls the

poet's childhood near the river Moyola, echoing its first appearance in 'Gifts of Rain', just as its 'pleasuring' directly recalls the fusion of earth and water in the same poem. Similarly, the girl becomes a surrogate priestess of the past, a 'chance vestal daughter' pouring a 'smooth libation' of what is 'vanished', 'twilit' as the darkness into which those other figures of myth, the mummers, disappeared. Nevertheless, the past can still redeem the present, the archetype still holds. In a reversal of the process traced in 'Traditions', the Irish language can still reverse its defeat by English, just as the river flooded in 'Gifts of Rain', thus

'To flood, with vovelling embrace,
Demesnes staked out in consonants'⁶⁶.

Speech and landscape can again conquer what for so long seemed irrefeemably lost, 'stepping stones' to a new sovereignty, legends for a new age.

Conversely, the remaining poems in Part One of Wintering Out deal not with new life but with age and death, again seen primarily in terms of Irish legend and history, and thus redeemable, at least through the poet's art. The tone is set in 'The Other Side', which contradicts the view of Ireland as 'Dives' in 'Gifts of Rain'. 'It's poor as Lazarus, that ground'. In the biblical passage which both draw on⁶⁸, this is itself double edged; the rich man is consigned to Hell while the beggar Lazarus ascends to heaven. Perhaps Ireland can also be raised from the dead, through its archetypes, the collective power of the race. 'The Other Side' itself deals with a purveyor of such religious myths, a mad neighbour described with the directness and exaggeration of youth - a monster from the poet's childhood who prefigures the policeman in 'A Constable Calls' - who takes on the mantle of a prophet, 'white haired/swinging his blackthorn'. In his condemnation of the Heaneys' 'scraggy acres' and their lack of biblical warrant, intolerance is fueled.

'Your side of the house, I believe,
hardly rule by the book at all'⁷⁰.

The scene is set for the coming civil war, an archetype of violence is established. This divide between stern evangelical Protestant and poor superstitious Catholic, 'mournfully' saying their rosary, is mapped out here by a stream, the river - in earlier poems - of Ireland's pre-history. The poem ends, metaphorically, in the dark, the same unlit yard as in 'Servant Boy' and 'The Last Mummer', but there is also a hint of possible reconciliation. The old man at last shows some sensitivity

to the problems of the 'other side', shy as if recognizing 'a stranger's weeping', while the young Heaney is seen as half decided on truce through future fertility, 'the price of grass seed'. This sense of divide and growing hostility, first defined in legend, becomes more pronounced, however, in 'The Wool Trade' (prefaced by Joyce's earlier description of the same split)⁷¹. The trading and weaving of wool is seen as yet another example of dying Irish tradition, again profoundly involved with native language and landscape, a legendary harmony now lost.

'Hills and flocks and streams conspired
To a language of waterwheels,
A lost syntax of looms and spindles'⁷².

The sadness of this decline is again expressed linguistically. Rambling phrases 'warm as a fleece/out of his hoard' and 'soft names' - like the 'soft blastings' of 'Toome' - now fade into the 'gallery of the tongue' through under-use. Trade turns from craft into its modern, mechanised, more English equivalent; its hardness and colour are symbolic of future brutality, an archetypal (inherent) violence -

'And I must talk of tweed,
A stiff cloth with flecks of blood'⁷³.

'Linen Town' continues this fabric/language motif and makes explicit the atmosphere of impending bloodshed. Heaney studies a painting completed shortly before civil war, twelve years before the 1798 rebellion of Wolfe Tone⁷⁵, 'created . . .

'On one of the last afternoons
of reasonable light'⁷⁴.

The hanging of McCracken helped create a new Irish language, that of violence and pain, 'the swinging tongue of his body', which makes such peacefulness impossible again - the Irish river of history is irreversibly turned now by the tide of war.

'Smell the tidal Lagan:
Take a last turn
In the tang of possibility'⁷⁶.

This coming violence is invoked in 'A Northern Hoard', the intensity of which reveals a new urgency in Heaney's work (learnt from legend). If it is possible to separate out a moment when the poet's work takes on major significance, it is here, a mysterious, tragic and yet representative tone based on surrender to native mythic archetype. 'A Northern Hoard' presents a series of nightmares, much like the earlier poem 'Dream'. All are tied in with Irish legend and evoke, in extreme form, a

spirit of disharmony and terror in the nation's history 'that plagued us all'. In section one, 'Roots', a lover's body, 'moonstruck' in the light from a street lamp, takes on the quality and texture of ancient landscape, 'drifted barrow, sunk glacial rock'. Love, however, is seen as difficult to maintain in a time of war - 'gunshot, siren and clucking gas' - and a place of irredeemable sin, 'our old Gomorrah'. Either it must be allowed to decay, or this spirit of violence - archetype of 'the pale sniper' - must be extirpated, 'we petrify or uproot now'. In the first dream of this 'hoard' of legends, Heaney approaches the mandrake, for so long viewed superstitiously because of the resemblance of its root to a twisted body, 'lodged human fork'. This is already soaked in 'tidal blood' (referring back to the tide of civil war unleashed in the previous poem) and yet it is also a plant lodged in native soil, 'earth sac'. Thus it unites the two images of Ireland already so painstakingly established, earth and water, land and stream. The poet therefore strikes at the heart of ancient tribal violence in this prophetic dream.

'And I wound its damp smelly loam
And stop my ears against the scream'⁷⁷.

Section two, 'No Man's Land', draws both its title and its atmosphere from trench warfare. The poet escapes the imprisonment of war-wounds like 'streaming webs' of blood - only to find that similar carnage now affects his own homeland. Past attempts to remedy this have merely proved ineffectual, while the poet's earlier lack of concern also 'condones' these metaphorical wounds on his nation (the sickness of archetype), 'infected sutures/and ill-knit bone'⁷⁸. In section three, 'Stump', Heaney describes his own speechlessness at such atrocities. Horror has reduced him to his own basics, shock forms its own kind of wound, 'I'm cauterized, a black stump of home'⁷⁹. 'No Sanctuary', the fourth section, expresses this violent horror by combining folklore and nightmare. Set at Halloween, the traditional turnip mask, with its ancestry of totemism and fire-worship, expresses the ancient identification of fertility and sacrifice, 'death mask of harvest'. Similarly, the Irish race seem to resume their native paganism, 'we ring and stare into unhallowed light'⁸⁰. Section 5, 'Tinder', shows the lack of comfort that this tribal past now brings; like the 'burnt out gable' of 'Stump', even the fire of 'No Sanctuary' is now extinguished, and only cold ashes are left. The Irish race treasure the relics of

their ancestors - flints, the 'cold beads of history and bone', 'charred linen' (an echo of 'Linen Town') - but these are now powerless, lacking the fire of new hope.

'What could strike a blaze
From our dead igneous days?'⁸¹.

The modern Irish form the superstitious 'ring' of the previous section. They face the oncoming darkness, prefigured in the final 'afternoon of reasonable light', 'red-eyed' like the 'red dog's eyes' of the turnip man. Reduced to the very basics of their past, this sparseness is a form of defiance, hope for a better future,

'With new history, flint and iron,
Cast-offs, scraps, nail, canine'⁸².

This sequence reveals a new power at work in Heaney's work, both in the bleakness of its despair - 'huddled at dusk in a ring' - and the haunting nature of its imagery, the turnip-man's head like a 'wrecker's lantern'. There is a deepening of response brought about by the poet's finding at last of a national, rather than simply personal, subject matter and, flowing from this, a development from closely observed naturalism to an equally precise employment of archetype and dream.

The final poems in Part One further establish this 'new history', carefully re-interpreting the violence and despair of the past in a way that can redeem both it and the present. The 'Canine' of the last poem is internalised in 'Midnight'. The extermination of the native Irish wolf by English hunters, his killing now done better by the 'professional wars' of the invader, is seen as a corollary of the destruction of the Irish spirit, or at least its subjugation, leaving even the poet incapable of utterance, 'the tongue's/leashed in my throat'⁸³. 'The Tollund Man', the first of Heaney's poems to deal with the bog people, skillfully combines details drawn from Glob's account⁸⁴ to evoke this sacrifice to the Earth Goddess. She, in turn, has - through the power of bog-water - preserved him as a kind of religious relic (Heaney has at last found a perfect contact of legend and archetype)

'Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body'⁸⁵.

Corpse becomes 'trove', a kind of hidden treasure, folklore is frozen into eternity. Heaney vows one day to visit Denmark to see these bog men for himself; for the moment he considers the relation of these ancient sacrifices to modern Ireland. In section II, the Tollund man is evoked to bless and 'make germinate' the corpses

of modern Irishmen just as senselessly and brutally murdered. They themselves are again a kind of bitter harvest - 'laid out in farmyards' - of indeed prey, 'trailed/for miles along the road'. The poet emphasises the gentleness and quiet forgiveness still visible on photographs of the Tolland Man, his 'sad freedom'. Section III concludes with the real reason for Heaney's interest in an alien culture, and his desire to visit remote Jutland, not even 'knowing their tongue'. In this place of murder and ancient sacrifice, modern Ulster is perversely mirrored,

'In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home'⁸⁶.

'Nerthus', the female deity to whom these bog men were sacrificed⁸⁷, gives her name to the brief poem that follows. Here, suitably for a goddess of fertility, bog peat is seen as fostering plant life as well as preserving human death, a heartening stubbornness of purpose and survival, 'a seasoned, unsleeved taker of the weather'⁸⁸. 'Cairn-Maker' echoes the poet's own action in section I of 'Land', though less recent. A friend has similarly made a permanent monument of himself from stone, - just as did the makers of ancient cairns, - robbing 'hillock and bogland', and feeling both fear and a 'strange affiliation' between man and nature, past and present. This harmony is expressed by the way in which the wild has again taken over, 'heather-bells/blowing in each aftermath of wind'⁸⁹. A different, and less natural, form of building is described in 'Navy'. Here, a modern roadworker, 'indifferent' to Irish legend or history, attempts to reduce the Irish terrain to order. Heeding neither 'weather or insults', he takes on the hard characteristics of his job, his clothes 'stiff as bark', his wrists grafted 'to the shale'. Even this representative of ~~the~~ order and technology, however, is not immune either from Ireland's past or from its bogland. Four years before, his bulldozer was (perhaps rather too symbolically) also swallowed in a peat bog, to join other relics there preserved in a historical present, past projected forward into future,

'with lake-dwellings and dug-outs,
pike-shafts, axe-heads, bone pins'⁹⁰.

'Veteran's Dream' deals with nightmare in which, as in 'A Northern Hoard', unhealed wounds serve as metaphor for Ireland's present sickness. A veteran of trench warfare, and now a neighbour of the poet's, he still dreams of the horrors of battle

His own injuries mirror the entire war (another archetype of terror), infected by

'A scatter of maggots, busy
In the trench of his wound'⁹¹.

This disease imagery is taken up in 'Augury', the final poem of Part One, and a kind of reply to, or continuation of, 'Oracle'. Here the sign revealed is a fish choked by pollution, and the poet seeks in vain for solutions to the analagous state of modern Ireland. Careful description abruptly yields to an image brutal in its suddenness, its vision of man's animality, for what can now

'Unpoison great lakes,
Turn back
The rat on the road'⁹².

~~Any~~ Part Two of Wintering Out sets out some possible answers. ~~xx~~ The poems here deal primarily with the poet's own experience - as did his earlier work - his marriage, his children and, eventually, his exile. As in the later North, however, the personal poetry of this second half is seen in terms of the history and legends, not to mention violence, of the first. Both are different aspects of the same, underlying archetype. The opening six poems deal with the poet's marriage and, in due course, the birth of his children, symbols of hope set against a background of grief and terror. 'Wedding Day' invests even this occasion of celebration and fertility with fear - 'wild grief', 'mourning', a 'skewered heart' - though it ends with an affirmation of tenderness, 'let me sleep on your breast', and escape 'to the airport'. 'Mother of the Groom' explores more conventional emotions, the mother's sense of loss of her son, mingled with earlier memories of bathing him, and a sense of her own age and settled routine. Her own wedding ring is 'bedded forever now/in her clapping hand'⁹³. The sense of pervading evil returns in 'Summer Home', with the newly married couple enduring 'a summer gone sour', even the bringing of wild flowers failing to assuage the wounds (evoked in Part One) of the past. However, mutual love seems at least to 'postulate thick healings' and, in a direct echo of 'Nerthus', fertility reasserts itself - 'long grains begin/to open and split' - through the promise of children. The poem ends with a bitter argument and, as the book opened, in the dark, but love remains, small and yet a measure of how properly to live, 'tiny as a tuning fork'. 'Serenades' places the night-time 'racket' of the poet's children with the other harsh, but lively, sounds of the Irish dark. Sedge-

warblers, crows and corncrakes represent in a more archetypal way the atmosphere of Ireland, just as the corncrake in his 'no man's land' (picking up Part II of 'A Northern Hoard') echoes gunfire with the 'ack-ack' of his song. 'Somnambulist' links these family poems with a series of very strange - even for Heaney - images dealing with loss and darkness. Here a child sleepwalks, and returns in tears as a despoiler - 'nestrobber's hands' - a wanton destruction of fertility which brings the nemesis of the next six poems, legend carried forward into the present.

'A Winter's Tale' returns to dark and winter, and transforms a girl attempting escape from home into a kind of goddess, pallid, blood-stained and open. She is 'bare-breasted', representing - as in 'Wedding Day' - warmth and love. Like Nerthus, she brings 'good luck' to the families whose home she so mysteriously visits, still other-worldly, but a symbol of community, legend made flesh.

'... She was there first
And so appeared no haunter
... making all comers guests'⁹⁴.

It is as if the girl has come back to the living as a kind of ghost, maternal - with 'uncradled breasts' - and dreamlike, another somnambulist. 'Shore Woman' describes another kind of nightly haunting, a fisherman's wife who walks by the sea remembering the terrors of her youth, now accepted -

'I have rights to this fallow avenue.
A membrane between moonlight and my shadow'⁹⁵.

This figure of lost woman is transferred fully to legend in 'Maighdean Mara', sharing 'cold breasts' with the straying girl, 'accents of fisher wives' with the sad narrator of the previous poem. Mara herself is a kind of mermaid⁹⁶ who has been lured inshore by desire - 'man-love nightly/in earshot of the waves' - but returns eventually to her heritage, darkness and dream, 'the great first sleep of homecoming'. This leads directly to the drowned child described so poignantly in 'Limbo', as concentrated and balanced a poem as Heaney had yet written. Fishermen, like those in 'Shore Woman', find a dead baby in their catch, and the poet imagines its mother 'ducking him tenderly', herself made hollow and 'dead' by the murder of her child, 'thrown back' as a reckling (archetype of rejected Ulster).

'He was a minnow with hooks
Tearing her open'⁹⁷,



deadly as the fish in 'Augury', and equally as symbolic of moral decay⁹⁸. Just as the mother's 'cross' is her illegitimacy, so this murder questions religious dogma. The crucified Christ has no efficacy in the limbo of the unbaptised, a 'cold glitter' of souls unregenerate even by the self-proclaimed fisher of men;

'Even Christ's palms, unhealed,
Smart and cannot fish there'⁹⁹.

Such religious doubt is not resolved until the final line of the whole book. This cruelty to the innocent continues into 'Bye-Child', where the imprisoned child is drawn by moonlight, but that other major pre-occupation of earlier poems, language, is now atrophied. His 'remote mime' is a symbol of embittered Ulster, showing too

'Your gaping wordless proof
Of lunar distances
Travelled beyond love'¹⁰⁰.

'Goodnight' re-enters darkness, the farmyard of 'Fodder', with the goddess/woman figure resuming control - she 'cancels everything behind her' - and bringing light. In turn, the final six poems of 'Wintering Out' deal with a sense of rebirth and new life that follows this death and decay, spring succeeding winter, even if this resolution is itself fraught with contradictions and its own, inherent dangers.

'First Calf' approaches this theme of new life direct, although the afterbirth reminds the poet of the 'semaphores of hurt', the pain of motherhood described earlier in 'Mother of the Groom'. 'May' celebrates the coming of spring, bringing light from darkness, 'marshlights in the summer dark'. The holy water of Ireland reappears to invade the kind of technology evoked in 'Navvy', 'the spring issuing/ right across the tarmac'¹⁰¹. Mysterious lights in the dark are evoked more fully in 'Fireside', another incursion of legend but also possibly natural, a goat with 'cold horns', 'the lamping of fishes'. Whichever is true, these lights remain benevolent, 'come to your senses, they're saying goodnight'¹⁰². 'Dawn' describes the coming of a new, more rational, day in which the poet escapes to the sea; even here, he cannot escape his race's casual destructiveness, this continuing legendary archetype, the underlying stain of violence. Stranded among cockles, Heaney is

'Unable to move without crunching
Acres of their crisp delicate turrets'¹⁰³.

These turrets still carry reminders of war, and the next poem 'Travel' presents a

similarly botched escape, away from Ireland's lush fruitfulness but not from intimations of terror, 'the dust settling in scorched grass'. The final poem, 'Westering', describes a hopefully more permanent escape to California, in a poem which draws together the motifs of the collection as a whole. A map of the moon - recently reached by man - recalls the poet's last night in rural Ireland, the moonlit yard recalling the opening poems, the farmyard of 'Fodder', the eggs of 'Servant Boy'. Spring has already come, but the Irish are embroiled still in the toils of religious dissention. On Good Friday, the day of sadness and sacrifice, Heaney's leaving is a 'dwindling interruption', just as his own crucifixion by the sorrows of his native land (a rather overblown, almost blasphemous image here) is coming to an end, 'what nails dropped out that hour?'. The road that brings escape unreels like a fishing line - a more fruitful catch than in 'Limbo' - an image in which the poet achieves a complexity rare in this part of the collection. Mingling together light, water, the road in 'Navvy' which follows the 'curve of the world', Heaney unravels the book's whole tangled pattern into four brief lines.

'Roads unreeled, unreeled
Falling light as casts
Laid down
On shining waters,'¹⁰⁴.

In exile, the guilt of Ireland, its crucifixion, is taken away from the poet and expressed instead in Nature itself, 'the moon's stigmata'. In an answer to the religious doubt expressed at the end of 'Limbo', it is assuaged through the central image of the religion whose dogmatic and sectarian interpretation creates the very pain and violence against which its basic tenets preach, hatred visited on love,

'A loosening gravity,
Christ weighing by his hands'.

Even this 'weighing' is double-edged - Christ both supports his own weight on the cross, and himself measures others' pain - suffering both for himself and the world. Heaney, in turn, is not to remain in exile but to return to Ireland, drawing from his further experiences - and the increasing bloodshed of the 'Troubles' - North, a collection more unified and more moving than Wintering Out but exploring the same territory (indeed, using the same structure), the archetype of violence traced from ancient Irish legend to the careful, symbolic brutality of the present day.

The second section of Wintering Out is noticeably less challenging than the first. Heaney abandons the close-packed imagery and density of reference - in particular the legendary allusiveness - that characterises this burrowing into the roots of the Irish race for a naturalism closer to the poet's earlier work. Thus, archetype yields to modernity, the eternal to the mere present. Philip Hobsbaum praised these very poems for their adherence to the 'central line of English poetry'¹⁰⁵ but this is surely their weakness, their lack of local specificity. Heaney was the brightest of the stars discovered by Hobsbaum when he imported the precepts of the Group with him to Belfast. Part One of Wintering Out, however, sees him leaving behind early melliflence, albeit tinged with the sinister, for major poetry based firmly on his own Irish culture and on the personal tension between heredity and intellect, the spade and the pen. Heaney is both a proud nationalist and yet one educated, to the limits of that education, by the culture that has subjugated his nation. There would be no real resolution to this dilemma, this tension - 'Heaney's poems are tight as clenched fists, coiled springs without emotional release'¹⁰⁶ - until the poet could broaden out his subject matter and yet remain true to Ireland. It was this that Heaney attempted, and achieved, in North. Critics soon joined in a chorus of praise, Simon Curtis celebrated Heaney's exploration of the 'stigmata of heredity' and answered Peter Dent's charge that the verse showed a 'tendency towards inflation'¹⁰⁸, while Stan Smith praised Heaney's honesty of purpose, 'the new, equivocal posture of the poet trying to pursue his vocation in a world where the unspeakable has already happened'¹⁰⁹. Heaney made this speakable.

North¹¹⁰ attempts both to explain and to exorcise the violence and sectarian bitterness of modern Ireland, firstly by investigating the country's legends and history and secondly by exploring the poet's own upbringing and tacit sense of complicity, two sides of the same archetype. An individual life is set against the experience of the whole tribe, Heaney's own coming of age, both as man and poet, gives a kind of hope for the community which passed on to him its own imbalances. Thus, the opening two poems, placed outside the main sequence, act as a double-headed dedication; personal, to Heaney's wife, and patriotic (in the best sense) to his countrymen. Family and native land are the two linked, but warring, themes of the whole collection, both capable of fullness and yet both also potentially deadly.

Their joint title, 'Mossbawn' - a bogland plant to be celebrated more directly in 'Belderg' - is symbolic of the tenacity of the Irish race, as well as its deep rootedness in the native earth of Ireland. The Irish are celebrated individually in 'Sunlight', collectively in 'The Seed Cutters'. In 'Sunlight', the poet evokes love in all its fullness, a 'tinsmith's scoop' embedded in the boundless fertility of the 'meal-bin', woman as provider of sustenance and preserver of order. Without her, there is a 'sunlit absence', the natural world inactive and productive, the sun itself merely 'cooling against the wall'. Heaney's wife redeems such natural beneficence. She reinvigorates this energy in the 'reddening stove', while her activity at baking and the 'space' that she creates - unlike the earlier 'absence' - provides both food and a mastery over time;

'again, the scone rising
to the tick of two clocks'^{III}.

It is not too fanciful, given the legendary shaping of modern experience throughout, to see this as a modern statement of civilization, the cooked replacing the raw. Similarly, this apparently simple vision of domestic harmony already includes echoes of the historic - and legendary - processes which led to it; the 'helmeted pump' refers to the Viking invasions described more fully later in the sequence. This same sense of historical continuity forms the main subject of 'The Seed Cutters'. Again, farm workers, though seen in the present, seem 'hundred of years away', as if in a crowded, vibrant painting of medieval peasants (again done from life) by Bruegel, another deeply Northern artist. Their seed cutting is described in the meticulous way of Heaney's early work, though with more consequence, seen as representative of the 'calendar customs' of the farming, and natural, year. It is unhurried - 'they are taking their time ... lazily halving each root' - but also under the sway of time, which is itself quietly at work 'yellowing the broom'. By implication, it is also ageing the seed cutters underneath. The scene itself evokes, as did 'Sunlight', a sense of stillness, a 'frieze' which freezes in art the whole Irish nation 'with all of us there, our anonymities'^{II2}. This sense of archetype, this representative quality - evoked through legend and history - is the keynote of the whole work, much as it was in Wintering Out.

The rest of North is divided, similarly, into two uneven parts, the first and longer dealing with the history of Ireland - viewed impersonally and approached

through the two related disciplines of linguistics and legend - and the second, shorter part concerned with the present, seen in terms of Heaney's own development, both as man and poet. Part I, the history of the various subjugations of Ireland, is framed by two poems dealing with Hercules' battle with Antaeus, a mythical expression of this continual battle between conquered and would-be conqueror, and of Ireland's eventual defeat. As in the opening two poems, action is frozen into art and legend, the flux of the present is stabilized into archetype by the events of the past. The first of these poems, 'Antaeus', is spoken by Ireland herself. She sees these battles between Antaeus and the wrestlers, the Irish and their invaders, as regenerative, certainly as long as the former's life-giving connection with the earth is not realized¹¹³. This closeness of the Irish to their native earth - to be celebrated throughout Part I - is described here in terms of birth, both individual and national. Antaeus is a true child of the earth,

'I am cradled in the dark that wombed me
And nurtured in every artery',

an image suggesting both nurturing and imprisonment. Similarly, each wrestling opponent only serves to strengthen this connection, 'renew my birth', and yet any further advancement seems atrophied, 'I cannot be weaned'. There is so far no sign of Hercules, who will resolve both, and in freeing subjugate, 'my elevation, my fall' (a pun on his throwing of Antaeus). Just as successive invaders make little real impression on Ireland until the English come to dispossess her of her birthright. The poems which follow deal with a linear survey of Irish history, tracing this submission - and tying it to the troubled present - through those relics which survive: bog people, quernstones, remnants of a now outmoded ritual, the trappings of legend.

In 'Belderg', the first of these poems, the past is brought to mind in just this way by 'quernstones out of a bog', a reminder to both poet and reader of Ireland's ancient past. They are memorials to when primitive man first began to till the fields - 'the first plough-marks' - and thus began the long, slow progress towards (supposed) civilization. A modern farmer, heir to this quiet cultivation, collects such relics lovingly as finds from the preserving bog of Ireland, using them to express his own 'congruence' with the past. The querns become a kind of legendary source of vision, each 'one-eyed', a 'pupil' found asleep under the eyelid of its

covering peat. This both informs the present day response to these primitive patterns - 'repeated before our eyes' - and provides a direct line to the modern imagination, the 'mind's eye' of the closing image. The farmer himself has cleared away modern detritus to illuminate (perhaps a little too patly, and in the wrong order) the three successive ages of prehistoric Ireland, concentric as a tree-trunk;

'His home accrued growth rings
Of iron, flint and bronze'^{II4}.

The poet's own sense of the past is fired more by linguistics, however, the ear rather than the eye. Discussion turns to Mossbawn, its capital letter indicating that here it refers to a place - presumably Heaney's house - a meaning that makes the opening two poems all the more poignant, wife and fellow Irish as his home. Here language and a physical building interact, both metaphors for the native race, 'older strains of Norse' intermingling with the 'forked' root of conquering English, the 'planter's walled-in mound', and rebel native Irish, 'persistent if outworm'. This strange and dense poem, the most packed and indeed incomprehensible that Heaney has yet dared, ends by returning to the quernstone and, through it (literally) a mysterious vision. Stone, body and tree - of life and of date rings - combine to express the perennial destructiveness of Ireland in an image of powerful incoherence, the most forceful treatment of that legendary archetype so far achieved.

'A world-tree of balanced stones,
Querns piled like vertebrae,
The marrow crushed to grounds'^{II5}.

Stones and bones, the dessicated remnants of both natural and human life, form the two dominant materials for the rest of North, lifeless but enduring, yielding only to time and the dust.

'Funeral Rights' moves from this general expression of Neolithic culture to a picture of its human representatives. These are seen, characteristically and true to the archetype, in violent death, and are approached through the rituals of mortality in two stages of the present: the poet's childhood and the more recent civil war. The former is seen as a kind of initiation ceremony - 'I shouldered a kind of manhood' - in which death is obedient, 'tainted' and inexorable, 'the black glacier of each funeral'. This sense of quiet order is shockingly absent from the equally 'neighbourly' murders of the current slaughter.

'we pine for ceremony,
 customary rhythms'^{II6},

the new rhythms being that of the mass cortege, 'muffled drumming' of 'family cars'. Family life is disrupted, the kitchen of the opening poem now 'emptied', and this funeral procession becomes a kind of legendary beast, a serpent that re-enters the tribal past - burial mounds, 'the megalithic doofway' - an image which suggests the similar swallowing into death and legend of the misled children of Hamelin. This burial in the past, both literal and metaphorical, helps allay 'the cud of memory' and resolve, temporarily, the blood-feud in terms of the similar peace-through-violence of those ancient warriors. Gunnar was 'disposed' and 'beautiful' under his mound, becoming part of legend, turning to the moon. 'North', the title poem, takes up the direction - 'we will drive north again' - and the setting - the fjords of Scandinavia - of this last section, but it makes such interest in the past more specific, though still dealing with the Viking invasions of Ireland. There are especially important in that - as the Romans had left the country alone and safely unconquered - the Vikings were the first to establish cities, notably Dublin, and to counteract the nomadic life of the Celtic natives. Strangely, Heaney ignores the creation in about the 5th century A.D. of a specifically Celtic and Christian culture, whose fame (and peacefulness) spread throughout Europe. Heaney's history of savagery and invasion is itself a seriously (albeit understandably) limited and limiting one. There are other, less brutal or treacherous, archetypes of the Irish race, there are other, less bloodthirsty or vengeful, legends, but these are ones that the poet decides to ignore. North is not the complete truth, however brilliant, it remains, at its best, a partial view.

North itself here returns to the 'unmagical' and the 'secular', the land itself bearing witness to human shaping, the 'hammered shod' of a bay'. Language resurrects the opposition in Wintering Out of earth and water, the land-based Irish and the invaders from across the sea. In a fine example of Heaney's ability to extend a complex sentence over a number of stanzas, achieving weight through clausal balance, the poet suddenly realizes that these warriors are not heroic but vulnerable and, ultimately, defeated. Like their now rusted swords, they warn precisely because of their failure to achieve anything beyond 'violence and epiphany'. Such watery wisdom

- 'ocean-deafened', 'buoyant' like the longships that brought them - sees the Vikings, and history itself, as rooted not in myth but economic power, expressed not in intellectual progress but in violence and rape, the archetype re-established.

. '... Thor's hammer swung
to geography and trade,
thick-witted couplings and revenges',^{II7}.

This new spirit of realism inspires, rather than depresses, the poet, for it tells him to delve deeper into his own heritage, language and earth.

'It said, 'Lie down
in the word-hoard, burrow
the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain',^{II8}.

This intricacy, typical of native Irish art - already celebrated in the 'corbelled' tombs of 'Belderg' and the serpent of 'Funeral Rites' - informs both the dense, clotted style of North and its intricate pattern of developing imagery. Heaney has to compose in the 'darkness' so well evoked in Door into the Dark and still not conquered in Wintering Out, where it related to legend and ritual. Light, when it comes, will be not a 'cascade' but natural and tied still to the north; 'aurora borealis' - the Northern Lights - and the comet which is to redeem the poet, albeit in the last poem in the sequence. Like the Vikings, Heaney must become a raider on a 'long foray' into the dark and cold, his sight clear as 'the bleb of the icicle', trusting in the 'nubbed treasure' of legend and history.

Heaney follows his own advice in 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces', a title which refers both to the ancient pottery - 'nubbed treasure' which inspires the poet to composition - and to the poem itself in its various sections. These themselves are trial pieces for this self-willed delving into legend and archetype. The idea of trial looks further forward to those poems dealing with the bog-people, the victims of death-judgements by their tribe, and their correlatives, those murdered by equally incomprehensible forces in sectarian Ulster. The poem opens with a skeletal image carved in stone. Its line is intricate as in the best Celtic art, and recalls both the 'coil and gleam' of the previous poem and 'A Lough Neagh Sequence', coiled as 'an eel swallowed/in a basket of eels'. It is nevertheless representative of far more, the whole economic and genealogical pattern of Irish history,

'interlacings elaborate
as the netted routes
of ancestry and trade'¹¹⁹.

In a somewhat over-strained analogy, this sinuous design - a 'swimming nostril' - becomes the 'migrant prow' of a longship 'sniffing the Liffey' and leaving its marks as these buried treasures: coins, combs and a long sword; commerce, art and warfare. Heaney rescues this image from bathos by turning it towards linguistics. The Viking founding of Dublin is expressed in terms of the sound of this longship landing, caught fast in Irish earth,

'its clinker-built hull
spined and plosive
as Dublin'¹²⁰.

This confidence, 'buoyant' as in the previous poem, carries over to the poet himself, its flowing line taken up in his own cursive handwriting (like the Irish monks he conveniently ignores) and a similarly twisting 'worm of thought'. Heaney comes to resemble the most famous literary Dane, Hamlet, in his delving into earth (and graves), his obsession with death - the skulls of not Yorick but his ancestors - and his role as 'parablist' of present day corruption, 'smeller of rot in the state'. Both, again, are shackled by the past, 'pinioned by ghosts and affections'. Like Hamlet, the poet resolves long and costly indecision by a sudden act of violence in a grave, here mimetic through identification with the invasions and ritual murders of the past. This call to glory in the violent and sadistic actions of the Vikings is doubly ironic, for their tortures recall those of modern Ulster, seen in a strange image of horror mingled with beauty, butchers creating an angel.

'they spread out your lungs
and made you warm wings
for your shoulders'¹²¹.

The skull motif, Vikings as Hamlet, returns to dominate the final section, as does the use of linguistics almost as an alternative reality. Words achieve a life of their own, 'hunting' over Ireland and its pervasive mingling of death and mother earth, 'the skull-capped ground'. Language, and the poet who employs it, must learn the quiet cunning of the old hunters¹²², and this can be both destructive and creative, just as the Danes could choose 'sites/for ambush or town'. Dublin, whatever its 'compounded history', remains a monument to their creativity, 'old

fathers' as well as bloody invaders.

This archeology of the race continues in 'The Digging Skeleton', the skull/bone motif further refined, in which an old book of anatomical plates provides 'mysterious candid' images of skeletons, alive and 'digging the earth like navvies', archetypal Irish labourers. Earth seems unrelenting - as it was to the 'Navy' in Wintering Out - but it does loosen enough to release the dead. Images of slow and patient labour, like the earlier seed-cutters, these digging corpses gradually take on more sinister implications. 'Even death lies', and this harsh labour is eternal, a graphic form of Hell. Its imprisonment - 'death's lifers' - and exile - which 'sends us abroad' - represent the archetypal withholding of repose for the Irish race. Indeed, the next seven poems deal with just such hostages from the dead: skeletons and the preserved victims of ritual murder. Their very lack of oblivion is both distressing and yet illuminating; they still have work to do.

The implications of this skeletal paring, an analogue of the poet's own stripping off of extraneous material in his search for the real Ireland, are investigated more delicately in 'Bone Dreams'. Heaney finds a small bone on the turf, once again associated with stone and treasure - 'nugget of chalk' - and a weapon in the battle between David and Goliath, oppressed and oppressor (that underlying archetype of Antaeus and Hercules), fought through the intellect.

'I wind it in
the sling of mind
to pitch it at England'¹²³.

The 'boneyard' which provided the digging skeletons becomes, in turn, a 'bone-house', itself a modern equivalent of the older form 'ban-hus'. Bone provides a 'language of touch' through which - in section II - the poet strips off later accretions to reach the original, skeletal Celtic. 'Ivied' Latin, 'erotic' Provencal French, the 'devices' of Norman French and the elaborate 'canopies' of Elizabethan English, which combined them all into a language of beauty but slavery, - 'the tongue's old dungeons' - all yield to their Germanic base. Its harsh sound is a concomitant of its users' directness, the 'iron flash of consonants', and their inventiveness, the 'dream-bower'. Section IV goes back even past language to the most basic function of bone, making love and thus renewing itself. Bone once more becomes stone, woman returning to native earth, in a beautiful image drawn from prehistoric

landscape and stressing man's eternal submissiveness to his love, time to eternity.

'... I am screes
on her escarpments
a chalk giant
carved upon her downs',^{I24}.

This image of woman expands - with a reverent sexuality reminiscent, say, of the Song of Solomon - to a full identification with prehistoric England (should it not be Ireland?). Her spine is a 'sunken fosse', her shoulder is Hadrian's Wall, in which the pattern of bone under flesh corresponds to stone fortifications now swathed in turf. Heaney travels over both, seeking - in a perhaps jarring double-entendre - Maiden Castle. Even the dead mole of section VI exemplifies this same deep relationship between bone structure and the landscape of native land, 'dreams' revealed only in extreme situations, love and death. In the next six poems, these dreams are specifically tied to those restless corpses, the bog people so recently reclaimed from the soil. Truly legend here can reveal the presence of archetype.

These six poems, originally published separately as a pamphlet, take up the subject - already sketched out in 'The Tollund Man' and 'Nerthus' - of recent Danish discoveries of Celtic victims of ritual fertility murder in a near miraculous state of preservation. P.V.Glob's account^{I26} once again forms the basis of these poems, but Heaney develops both their ties with the earth and their links with modern Ireland, and provides a sensitive commentary (Glob's photograph's seem more of an influence, again, than his actual text).

'Come to the Bower' provides a general introduction, delving into the earth past vegetation and coins to the real treasure, the 'dark-bowered queen' of earth and darkness, a Venus of the north 'matter of fact' as in 'Girls Bathing, Galway 1965'. Her corpse is still fresh, bearing clearly the mark of the gorget which strangled her. She connects with water, as in Wintering Out, to reinvigorate fertility, 'spring water/starts to rise around her'. This preserved spirit is more important, more truly 'bullion', than any gold that this water might bear, and 'Bog Queen' speaks directly for this local deity, made properly regal by her long ordeal.^{I27} She describes her long incarceration in earth and the decay, or rather transmutation, of the trappings of state in the enveloping peat: her diadem 'carius', her sash a 'black glacier' (curiously, the same phrase used to describe the childhood funerals

in 'Funeral Rites', later ceremonies of death). Her discovery is first seen as another kind of rape - 'stripped/by a turfcutter's spade' - but it is also gentle and respectful. Through it, the queen rises from darkness to reclaim sovereignty, powerful just because of her sad fragmentation, another 'mubbed treasure' recreated in bone, art and light, a mysterious revelation.

'hacked bone, skull-ware,
frayed stitches, tufts,
small gleams on the bank'^{I28}

The following three poems stress the position of these bog people as victims, scapegoats for the inherent (archetypal) violence of the North. 'The Grauballe Man' again stresses how long immersion has made these corpses a function of the natural processes to which they have been exposed. The man 'seems to weep/the black river of himself', his spine the sinuous eel of 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces', his death wound opening, like earlier poems, direct into primal dark. The horrifying immediacy of this corpse and its terrible straining, 'bruised like a forceps baby', well evokes the photograph which inspired the poem^{I29}, but memory transmutes him from history to legend, 'perfected' in the imagination. Here, mingling 'beauty and atrocity', he becomes as archetypal as the 'Dying Gaul', and yet still shockingly real. As scientifically quantifiable as his fellows, his place in recent folk legend is as real as - and balanced against - cold reality, archetype of sacrifice,

'... the actual
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped'^{I30}.

'Punishment' makes this sense of guilt and outrage more personal and contemporary. The poem describes a young girl executed for adultery^{I31}. The manner of her execution and humiliation is made numbingly immediate, wind blowing 'her nipples/to amber beads', weighed down in the bog by 'floating rods and boughs'. Heaney also recreates the sensuality of this 'poor scapegoat' - 'flaxen-haired' and with a 'tar-black face' - but admits his own imaginative complicity, an 'artful voyeur' of her remains who would have similarly helped scourge her with 'the stones of silence'. This guilt is not a mere poetic device, for the girl's role as scapegoat, and her 'tar-black' face, connect her directly with her 'betraying sisters' tarred and feathered in Ulster for fraternisation (a political form of adultery?) with the

other side. Heaney stands dumb at this updating of ritual sacrifice, pretending to 'civilized outrage' but conniving at a similarly indefensible, communal slaughter to

'yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge'^{I32}.

The obsessive imagery of death in this poem - the 'brain's exposed/and darkened combs' - continues into 'Strange Fruit'^{I33}. This description of a decapitated head confirms, if nothing else, Heaney's powers of precise evocation^{I34}. Flesh has come to resemble fruit, the head itself a 'gourd', 'prune-stones' as teeth, hair a fern, but, as in 'Come to the Bower', this death is both fragile and valuable to the race, a 'perishable treasure'. It also survives, yet expresses, both dark and peat. Its blank eyeholes are as fathomless as 'pools in the old workings' and masterful enough to survive any attempt either to destroy or worship, 'outstaring/what had begun to feel like reverence'. It is their very humanity which makes these corpses so representative, so archetypal, yet saddening or, here, 'nameless, terrible'.

This representative quality is stressed in 'Kinship', the final bog poem in the sequence, which ties these victims more coherently to Irish history, culture and myth. Like the earlier 'Bogland', it opens with an exploration of native habitat. Earth and water meet half way to form peat, which drowns the unwary and yet provides energy, kills and yet preserves. Peat provides this 'kinship' between poet and 'strangled victim', a form of dream through which he can regain his 'origins', wildness recalled in domestic tranquillity, legend made everyday,

'like a dog turning
its memories of wilderness
on the kitchen mat'^{I35}.

Bogland combines dark and mystery, 'cooped secrets/of process and ritual', with the same essential impenetrability as the 'eyeholes' of the previous poem. Each pool is also a reminder of both fertility and burial, 'the unstopped mouth of an urn'. Section II returns to linguistics to give an expanded definition of 'bog', as if taken from a particularly imaginative dictionary. It is not the 'slime kingdom' of swamp but a combination of 'pollen bin', 'insatiable bride', 'bone-vault' (ban-hus again) and the 'floe of history'. Once more this is tied closely to the human brain - the 'combs' of 'Punishment', the 'coil and gleam' of 'North', the 'outback of my mind'. Section III continues the digging motif which lies at the heart of Heaney's

early work, although here a sexual connotation enters as well, 'the shaft wettish/
as I sank it upright'. The poet discovers a 'love-nest', like that in the bracken
in which the victim was found in section I. The spade itself has been taken back
by Nature, 'overgrown/with a green fog'. Placed upright by Heaney, it forms an
'obelisk', an upright monument to earth, paralleled by the raising of a 'cloven oak-
limb' - mysterious symbol of fertility, the 'Venus-bone' of 'Come to the Bower'.

'I stand at the edge of centuries
facing a goddess',¹³⁶.

Section IV moves to autumn with its mingling of decay and fruitfulness - 'sump and
seedbag', 'ferments of husk and leaf' - and this is seen, again, linguistically.
Autumn in bogland is 'the vowel of earth', a process of endless death and recreation

'a windfall composing
the floor it rots into',¹³⁷.

Nature too is asleep, 'dreaming its root' of coming fertility. The poet is both
rooted in this and drawn back to it, a weeping willow who weeps at his nation's
tragedy, bending back to earth and the 'appetites of gravity'. In section V,
therefore, Heaney bends back to his childhood and to memories of his own help with
turf-gathering, associated both with this autumnal fertility and a form of love,
the 'cupid's bow' and 'socketed lips' of the cart itself. The driver becomes a
part of legend. 'God of the wagon' through such providing, a 'hearth-feeder', the
poet is his assistant in this mystery, 'squire of his circuits'. Like his funeral
attendance earlier, this turf gathering becomes another rite of passage for the
young Heaney, bringing maturity along with the respect of the tribe,

'my manly pride
when he speaks to me'.

The final section of 'Kinship' salutes an earlier observer of these Northern
rituals, the Roman historian Tacitus¹³⁸. Heaney sees himself as similarly worthy
of such anthropological study; like his ancestors, he too is immersed in ritual and
lives in close contact with his past, near an 'old crannog/piled by the fearful
dead'. The land itself expresses this atmosphere of violence and decay,

'Our mother ground
is sour with the blood
of her faithful',¹³⁹,

their death-throes are 'gargling/in her sacred heart'. The Roman legions stare in

disbelief 'from the ramparts' (just as modern British troops similarly watch from behind their barricades) at such ritual slaughter. Heaney invokes Tacitus to come back again and 'report us fairly', just as did the bog murders. It needs some impartial outsider to calmly describe modern fake morality - 'how we slaughter/for the common good' - kangaroo court justice, shaving the heads 'of the notorious', and the continuing, archetypal power of legend. The goddess now is not Nerthus but religious fanaticism, yet it is still dangerous, potent and enveloping;

, 'how the goddess swallows
our love and terror'^{I40}.

The bog people are not merely bizarre historical curiosities but a warning and a parallel of the same intolerance at the heart of what claims to be civilization, a violence - drawn from legend and archetype - not of invaders but of the natives.

Some (though unfortunately not all) of the charged seriousness released in the poet by this delving into the remote (yet vividly recreated; or perhaps imagined) past seeps over into his treatment of more recent history and, most difficult of all, the present day. The remaining poems in section I continue this survey of Irish history to its most recent invasion, that of the English through, in turn, the Tudors, the Act of Union and modern troops. This history of oppression is paralleled, in an extraordinary way, by Heaney's own conquest of his wife. Such delving into the poet's own duplicity and violence - as much a part of the brutal archetype of legend as the bog murders or modern sectarian killings - sets North apart from earlier, more simplistic, attempts at the same subject matter, most notably Wintering Out. The rape of Ireland, the basic metaphor underlying the next two poems, broadens out into poetry which unites bravely the personal and the political, the poet and his native land.

I4I

'Ocean's Love to Ireland' uses the near cliché of sexual/territorial conquest to express Ireland's betrayal by the English. Based on an anecdote related by John Aubrey^{I42}, Raleigh's seduction of a local maid parallels England's drive to conquer the Irish, the ocean of 'North' flooding the native land of 'Kinship', both inexorable and yet gentle, raising her skirt,

'Her farthingale like a scarf of weed lifting
In the front of a wave'.

In reality, however, this sea tides for Elizabeth, the Cynthia of Raleigh's poem^{I23}

rather than the Irish tributaries, themselves the muddy puddle over which he lays down his cloak of his queen. Ireland is already a testing ground for religious slaughter, - that same old archetype - the 'mouthing corpses' of the armed invaders sent by the Pope and massacred at Smerwick^{I44}, 'sowed' as were the bog people. The Irish are fully subjugated, their language and culture defeated militarily by the 'iambic drums' of English'. The only escape is back into landscape, redeeming her heritage 'into ringlet-breath and dew'. 'Aisling' continues this false wooing, again based on poetry^{I45} and described linguistically, 'a decadent sweet air'. In reprisal, Ireland's own reciprocal future treachery is hinted at, just as Diana turned her lover, Actaeon, into a stag, his wooing reduced to an 'exhausted belling', torn apart by his own hounds.

This disunity carries on into 'Act of Union'^{I46}. Taking up the central conceit of 'Bone Dreams', lovers are evocations of landscape, their child a 'bog-burst/a gash breaking open the ferny bed'. The territorial greed of earlier poems appears to be at an end - 'conquest is a lie' - and love brings independence through sharing, 'conceding your half-independent shore'. Man's 'tall kingdom' embraces the 'heaving province' of the womb, and brings personal, if not political union. Section II shows, however, that this harmony is just as illusory as it is in statecraft, and that love expresses, rather than escapes, this forced dominance. The poet is still 'imperially male' and his wife still suffers 'the pain/the rending process in the colony'. Even the unborn child seems a representation of the political climate, his heart a 'wardrum' - 'answering the 'iambic drums' of the English mastery, and his very posture in the womb aggressive. The conceit here becomes ridiculous, the womb as the Irish Sea and the foetus as parasite (archetype pushed into absurdity), a slackness of control reflected in the language itself.

'... ignorant little fists already
Beat at your borders and I know they're cocked
At me across the water.'^{I47}

The poem only regains seriousness when again tied in with Heaney's abiding concern with Ireland as mother earth, archetype returned from artifice to legend. By the same analogy, the nation's birth-pangs are felt in the excavations that exposed both Viking relics and the bog people. Both bring revelation and yet pain, the poet's wife and Ireland both left symbolically naked, 'raw, like opened ground, again'

This violence continues even into the ceremony of marriage, infiltrating the very very heart of fertility, as seen in 'The Betrothal of Cavehill'. Here, ritual gunfire in honour of the poet's wedding recalls the snipers of Belfast, just as Cavehill itself represents the north, 'proud, protestant ... and male'. An Adam before the 'shock of gender', he has not yet yielded a rib from which Eve can be created. If male is rock, then female evokes the 'hideouts' of native earth and bogland, the wife's body still secret, legendary: 'her rods and broom'.

The final poem of Part I, 'Hercules and Antaeus', echoes and answers the first by relating Ireland/Antaeus's eventual defeat. Hercules raises Antaeus from the earth and thus weans him - a birth like that in 'Act of Union' - but also kills this 'mould-hugger' by removing him from his native, sustaining element 'into a dream of loss and origins', the elegy of North itself. Hercules sums up all that is not Irish, a 'snake-choker' as compared to the sinuous line of Celtic art in 'Viking Dublin'. 'Sky-born' rather than a creature of earth, a force not of bog-darkness but light, Hercules is a 'blue prong graiping' the 'black powers' which feed off Ireland and nourish its past, the hidden forces of archetype,

'... the cradling dark,
the river-veins, the secret gullies
of his strength'¹⁴⁸.

Irish legend, like that of other dead civilizations, becomes of interest only to 'elegists' like Heaney, 'Balor will die/with Bryrthnoth and Sitting Bull'. Antaeus himself becomes a form of landscape, 'a profiled ridge'. Thus the endless renewal of 'Ocean's Love to Ireland', 'possessed and repossessed', is ended by this symbolic loss of contact between the Irish and their native bogland, the guardian of the past. It fails any more to bring comfort, 'pap for the dispossessed'. As the opening poem suggested, elevation leads to a fall, and the rest of North expresses this process in terms of a specific history, that of the poet himself (to be further sharpened, made even more archetypal, in Stations). Heaney's education in English culture separates him from that fruitful contact with farm-work and the earth which indeed his early poems try to recreate. Here, at last, is the reason for the lack of resonance in there later poems - Eden, once lost, cannot be regained, even through the willing of art, new legends cannot so easily be created.

Part II of North deals, therefore, with modern, rather than historical Ireland

and with Heaney's own 'weaning'. It is written, therefore, in a more colloquial, less dense, style than the bardic and linguistically complex language of Part I, with its obsession with roots: racial, verbal and national. There is, however, a running motif here of slavery and oppression, balanced by the sense of release and escape in the final poem, which grows out of the history of Ireland's own past subjugation so subtly traced in Part I. The opening three poems of Part II deal directly with this governing image of slavery, from which poetry offers the one possible escape, and the remaining poems follow this through by describing Heaney's own coming to age as a poet (themselves, of course, a function of this development).

'The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream'¹⁴⁹ expresses this sense of personal imprisonment in terms of dream - it has a jokey Ruritanian feel at odds with the rest of North - the poet attempting to free his people from 'the masonry of state and statute'. He is himself incarcerated, however, another victim of the police state; 'I am honoured to add a poet to our list. The reader becomes a voyeur, watching Heaney's attempts at escape (as he earlier watched the frozen, intimate suffering of the bog people). This sudden slackening of poetic tension (prose after tightly structured verse) provides a comic breathing space, but with 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' the genuine paranoia at state repression is revealed in all its bitterness. The poet is again imprisoned, this time by the media and its tired clichés (the linguistic concern continued from Part I), echoed in turn by Heaney himself, 'expertly civil tongued with civil neighbours', part of the complicity; 'we're on the make/as ever... fork-tongued on the border bit'. Still he searches for a genuine mode of expression - angling again - 'to lure the tribal shoals to epigram/and order', seeking the 'right line' - fishing, poetic or political - to bring peace. Linguistic subtlety is itself part of this civil war, 'manoeuvrings to find out name and school', a new angle to that archetype of intolerance, 'tight gag of place' like the gorget in 'Come to the Bower', 'coiled' tongue like the furrowed brain of 'North'. In a rare reference to classical myth, rather than to native legend, the Catholics are like the sly invaders of Troy, a hidden menace,

'... cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
Beseiged within the siege, whispering morse'¹⁵⁰.

Section IV reprints the lines which preface Wintering Out, a chilling description

of a real prison, like the previous poem 'a bad dream with no sound'. These bitter 'coherent miseries' at least offer the possibility of escape, a fulfilling of 'our little destiny' just as the bomb crater of 'fresh clay' has its place along with the earthworks and bogs of Part I. Archetype shades from legend into the everyday, 'Freedman' completes and resolves this section on slavery by again delving into the past. Just as the Romans trained slaves from 'backward'^{I51} regions to learn a useful trade, and thus civilize them, so English culture has, through school, university and their 'parchments and degrees', given the young Heaney such an education. 'Subjugated' by the annual routine of religious observance - 'calendars all fast and abstinence' - the poet is still 'earth-starred' like Antaeus, a victim of suppression and surveillance. 'Census-taking eyes' fasten 'like lampreys' and leech on native talent. Heaney is freed only through his discovery of poetry, which ~~can~~ 'abjure all cant and self-pity' though this too is a form of betrayal, turning teaching against itself, (the archetype too enduring lightly to be escaped),

'And poetry wiped my brow and sped me.

Now they will say I bite the hand that fed me'.

This discovery of poetry forms the major subject of the final, and longest, poem in North, 'Singing School'. It is itself a kind of para-history of modern Ulster, seen through the eyes of the growing poet, which parallels the history of ancient Ireland presented in Part I^{I52}, archetype developed from Celtic legend to the young Heaney's own biography, itself given legend's representative power (and simplification). 'The Ministry of Fear' takes its title from a contemporary novel,^{I53} to describe the poet's schooling in terms of this religious and social divide, the 'lonely scarp' of boarding school (echoing the 'escarpements' of 'Bone Dreams'), his very rhymes trampling 'all over the fine lawns of elocution', nevertheless 'dabbling' in these verses until 'they have become a life'. Language remains a social barrier -

'... Catholics, in general, don't speak

as well as students from the Protestant schools'^{I54} -

and poetry itself is suspect, 'hieroglyphics' read uncomprehendingly at a roadblock. Even courting, however, is tainted by such police surveillance, 'the muzzle of a sten-gun in my eye', and Ulster, for all the work of Spenser and Raleigh, has no inalienable 'rights on the English lyric'. This 'ministry of fear' is again seen at work in section 2, 'A Constable Calls', a development of the 'census-taking' of

'Freedman' into a mixture of 'arithmetic and fear'. The poem has a kind of hallucinogenic clarity and obsession, most notably in the description of his bike,

'Heating in sunlight, the 'spud'
Of the dynamo gleaming and cocked back',

black, shiny and threatening as the policeman's gun, a symbol of enslavement. Behind both is the spectre of British power, 'the black hole in the barracks' (the dark again, just as the bike heats 'in sunlight' as in the opening poem). Heaney's remembered early fear, 'small guilts' at this ritual, is a 'domesday book' which both recalls the past and foretells future doom. The sound of the departing bicycle is a symbolic time bomb, set under Ulster and ready to explode;

'... His boot pushed off
And the bicycle ticked, ticked, ticked'.

'Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966' presages future violence even more threateningly. The marching Orangeman, like the policeman, seems a giant automaton, a figure half-real, half-legend. Like the creations of Heaney's fellow countryman Flann O'Brien, he seems close to being a machine, 'each arm extended by a seasoned rod'. Like the 'iambic drums' of 'Ocean's Love to Ireland', the drumming here is military and aggressive, 'like giant tumours' indicating something rotten in the state, and hit 'until his knuckles bleed'. A direct reference back to the Orange drums in 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', the very air now is 'pounding like a stethoscope', diagnosing the 'tumours' of future civil war, a Protestant challenge. 'No Pôpe' is soon to be answered in like kind, intolerance breeds intolerance.

In 'Summer 1969', this erupts into violence at last, involving the subjects of both previous two poems, but, while 'the Constabulary covered the mob/firing into the Falls', Heaney himself is far away, on holiday in Spain, though he cannot escape his native land so easily. The fishmarket smells like 'the reek off a flax-dam', while (in a more strained analogy) the uniform of the Civil Guard 'gleamed like fish-bellies in flax-poisoned waters', a pollution representing Ireland's estrangement from her native soil, and mirroring her political malaise. Heaney is unsure of his direction - should he return to 'try to touch the people' or, like Lorca, give up his life in civil war. His solution is provided unexpectedly. Retreating to the Prado, Heaney encounters Goya's painting of the tragedy of Civil War, along with his more oblique canvases of discord and terror¹⁵⁵ (the same old

archetype). It is Goya's method here that most appeals to the poet, passionate and impatient, violent as the bullfight watched earlier on the television and yet substituting emotion - as a defence and as a banner - for bloodshed, for legend.

'He painted with his fists and elbows, flourished
The stained cape of his heart as history charged'¹⁵⁶.

'Fosterage' further defines the poet's role in the midst of this horror, for 'description is revelation'. Heaney, 'newly cubbed in language', learns how to employ this new power, achieving precision yet not overstatement; 'don't have the veins bulging in your biro'. For such advice and gentle 'fosterage', Heaney is still grateful to his early mentor, Michael McLaverty, his best monument North itself, with its resulting concern with language, words 'imposing on my tongue like obols', the 'nubbed treasure' of 'North'. This 'note of exile' forced on Heaney here to help him attain 'the lineaments of patience' finds its expression in 'Exposure', a tying together of the governing motifs - the underlying archetype of the collection.

As in Wintering Out, this final poem celebrates exile, albeit here in another part of Ireland, Wicklow in the Republican South, rather than in California. It marks a return to the Irish countryside seen elegiacally, in the 'spent flukes of autumn' and in twilight. The poet re-enters legend, imagining 'a hero/on some muddy compound', his gift the 'sling of mud' from 'Bone Dreams' here 'whirled for the desperate'. As indecisive as Hamlet in 'Viking Dublin', Heaney is seen carefully 'weighing and weighing/my responsible tristia'. Despite the conclusion of 'Fosterage', this process is still confused - is poetry merely melodic, 'for the ear', populist, 'for the people', or a statement of what cannot be spoken out loud, 'what is said behind-backs'? The rain itself seems to answer, suggesting 'let-downs and erosions' and yet recalling the 'diamond absolutes' which the poet strives for, just as he seeks the 'comet' - some divine revelation - at the beginning of the poem. Heaney comes to realize that, like James Joyce in 'Summer 1969' and Katherine Mansfield in 'Fosterage', he is an 'inner émigré', but one who has retreated not into self-absorption but away from the massacre of civil war back into Nature. 'Taking protective colouring' from his surroundings, 'bark and bole', 'feeling every wind that blows' - both literally and metaphorically - he can here attain a passionate neutrality, freed at last from the twin forces of archetype and legend.

'Neither internee or informer', instead 'grown long-haired/and thoughtful';
 bent over a wood fire, he is 'blowing up these sparks' of history and legend
 for their 'meagre heat', a hope that Ireland will overcome its present
 troubles just as it has done the tragedies of the past. Nevertheless, through
 just this process, his obsession with linguistics and the past as forms of
 comfort, Heaney has missed his one moment of revelation (as, by implication,
 has the reader, similarly sidetracked), archetype made manifest and visible;

'The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
 The comet's pulsing rose',¹⁵⁷

This beautiful image, fertility from light, concludes a developing tension
 between light and darkness in North. (a similar dichotomy helped structure
Wintering Out). In Part I, light occasionally illuminated the darkness of
 peat and prehistory - the 'cascade of light' in 'North', the moon in 'Funeral
 Rites', the 'small gleams' in 'Bog Queen', 'rush-light' in 'Ocean's love to
 Ireland' and the 'spur of light' in 'Hercules and Antaeus'. Similarly, Part
 II expresses oppression and fear through darkness - the evenings at St.
 Columb's College and the night patrols in 'The Ministry of Fear', the
 shadow of the policeman in 'A Constable Calls', the 'dark corners' and
 Goya's painted nightmares in 'Summer 1969'. This opposition between, basically,
 good and evil is not resolved, and indeed one of the lessons of the historical
 survey of North is that events and situations do repeat themselves, both
 in life and art, just as the situation of modern, and prehistoric, Ireland
 is represented in a painting by a Spaniard, Goya, in which

'... two beserks club each other to death
 For honour's sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking',¹⁵⁸

The poet of North offers no easy solutions, his investigation of the
 past and of native legend leading only to 'exposure', either to the elements
 or to the reality of the situation. The final image has much of the beauty
 but little of the finality or harmony of, say, the linking of fire and rose
 at the end of Eliot's Four Quartets¹⁵⁹, and it is this lack of a rounded
 conclusion which both, ultimately, prevents this work fulfilling the rich

promise of its first half - if part two matched it in either poetic density or structural harmony the whole work would undoubtedly be a masterpiece - and yet makes it true to the very uncertainty and incompleteness of the tangled situation from which it arises. Certainly North reveals new depths in Heaney's art through this archeology of Irish legend and pre-history, opening up his responses to landscape in a way not seen in his more prosaic descriptions of the modern world, and only hinted at in his early poetry. Nevertheless, this employment of native folklore and legends is double-edged, rediscovering the past and yet failing to fully realize the present, except mimetically. This impasse was also faced, and demolished, by Geoffrey Hill in Mercian Hymns¹⁶⁰, and it is an extraordinary - though illuminating - coincidence that Heaney was exploring the same areas of experience and prose epiphanies in the opening sections of Stations¹⁶¹ when Hill's work suddenly appeared -

'What I had regarded as stolen marches in a form new to me had been headed off by a work of complete authority'¹⁶².

Heaney had begun Stations during his stay in California, as he self-mockingly relates, as part of the same searching for roots which also informs the work of Thom Gunn, to be discussed later, and Gary Snyder's Earth House Hold¹⁶³.

'nature mysticism stuff was hot on the ground - everyone trying to be a Red Indian or whatever - and I was re-entering little spots of time really. It was the pleasure of writing them up'¹⁶⁴.

Living in Wicklow released the rest of the sequence, written rapidly and unlocking

'moments at the very edge of consciousness which had lain for years in the unconscious as active lodes ... points on a psychic tour, stations that I have often made unthinkingly in my head'¹⁶⁵,

the poet's antennae receiving these signals and discerning their connection with the 'Troubles', the 'sectarian dimension of that pre-reflective experience'. These stations are also, however, points of arrival, the poet finding, in the very act of composition, 'the excitement of coming for the first time to a place I had always known completely'. Heaney has since expressed uncertainty as to his methods and intention - 'between pointing towards a coherent prose account and not being a sequence'¹⁶⁶ - and sees them as not resolved enough, too 'pious', but it is this which makes Stations so expressive. The archetype of Irish legend finds its truest expression in the violence and duplicity of Heaney's childhood.

Stations provides an alternative history of post-war Ireland, again tied intimately to the poet's own childhood and adolescence - as in North - but more mannered, mandarin, Joycean epiphanies dredged up from the past. These prose pieces are less taut than Geoffrey Hill's Mercian Hymns, less scholarly and pared down, but they share the same sense of the ridiculous, the same sudden visions of natural beauty, the same deliberate confusions of historical time. The later sections of Stations are certainly influenced by Hill's delight in a difficult, precise vocabulary, but such limits give Heaney a freedom, a mystery even, of response denied elsewhere by the pull of natural description, the spade rather than the pen. Like Hill, Heaney traces his childhood chronologically through the sequence, personalising social history into legend, the growth of a nation traced in one both representative and unique, set apart. These 'stations' are both heir to the Cross and British Rail, the sacred and profane.

The opening (prose) poem, 'Cauled', begins, appropriately enough, in an Irish field. The poet is born into light and (adapting the motif of 'A Lough Neagh Sequence') 'fishes for meaning, catching branches in his grasping hands, 'he caught a rod in each hand and jerked the whole tangle into life'. He is lost among 'pods' - as in 'The Ministry of Fear' seed for the future - but is himself 'netted' by vegetation and the dark, 'a caul of shadows', and already part of his nation's heritage of sorrow, 'they had found him at the first onset of sobbing'. The other native heritage is language, the poet first located at the root of 'kindly tongues', and both unite in his first utterance, one of fear and grief. The double focus of Stations is already in operation, Heaney and modern Ireland reflecting one another's wounds. Section 2, 'Branded', establishes further this birthmark of pain, 'the inflamed crescent on his breast', again located through the landscape of mother earth. The young poet clutches, literally, at straws during harvesting, but tumbles back to earth, planting the seed of self, 'his small head hits the ground like a pod splitting open to the sky'. Recuperating, weeping in sunlight, he is granted a vision of dust caught in light which recreates the accident - the poet trapped underneath a bolting horse and 'branded' by its hooves, both in mind and body.

'Slowly notes compose the opening of a hairy canopy as the pastern

unclouds its moon and again the shod hoof strikes and brands him'¹⁶⁷.

New heaven, new earth, the overbearing stallion representing the oppressive who already, by proxy, stress their domination and ability to punish. The poet, nevertheless, continues his explorations under the belly of his peers.

The following poem, 'Hedge-school', opens a group of five which consider incidents from the young Heaney's schooling - in the natural world rather than the classroom - and his gradual realization of his triple heritage, mother earth, oppression by the Protestant hierarchy, and the healing power of native legend. The poet regains his native element, bogland, where earth and water meet, 'cool and wet'. He is once again part of the fertility of nature - 'pod ridges, legs of starlings' - the adult world again distant, 'humble and familiar as pads across grazing', but still spoiling this 'big air' of evening, domesticating it 'as if it lay over utensils on a back window-sill'. Through close regard of this natural beneficence and its very other-worldliness, a bunch of wild primroses 'imploding pallors, star plasm, nebula of May', the poet nevertheless escapes, 'stared himself into an absence', until told to desecrate this very fertility for cold ritual, 'pull them for the May altar'. Religion destroys such beauty of place for a faked symbolism and the poet for a third time is drawn to still-remembered tears, finding his birthright and being dragged away back to the world of adults, 'homesick, going home'. In 'Nesting-ground', fourth in the sequence, Heaney regains the earth but is properly frightened, the darkness of nests in the riverbank (water close to earth again) as mysterious as it was in Door into the Dark. The otherness and danger of the natural world is stressed - the 'surprising density' of a dead robin's beak, the 'cheeping' which could be either bird or rat - and he stands, as with the wild primroses, guardian (both priest and 'sentry') of these unfathomed mysteries,

'putting his ear to one of the abandoned holes and listening for the silence under the ground'¹⁶⁸.

Section 5, 'Sinking the shaft', opens, by contrast, in noise and sunlight, the man-made hole into which the pump is to be set a 'wound' in the earth, symbol, again, of English oppression. The sound seems to continue from nightmare and, as in the earlier 'Rite of Spring', the pump is a sexual signal, though

here not female fertility but male (and military) domination -

'Snouted, helmeted, the plunger like an active gizzard, the handle dressed to a clean swoop, set on a pediment ... I suppose we thought it never could be toppled,'¹⁶⁹.

Nevertheless, these 'strange voices' will one day be extirpated.

'Waterbabies', sixth in the sequence, continues this idea of schooling, from innocence to experience, mud again the favoured element, where earth and water meet, and warfare the coming preoccupation. These new 'waterbabies' colonise a 'fetid corner' as 'Botany Bay' - exile again - mastering water as in 'Undine' but for play not agriculture, war not peace; a 'black marina' of pirate ships, 'white feathers' for sails which also suggest cowardice, the real bomber which disturbs this fantasy. Equally 'perversely' and as testimony to the destructiveness such imagination of war engenders, the poet 'once fouled' a gift here', the kaleidoscope of light to which he was born submerged, literally, in the damp and the dark, 'messed and silted'. 'Childhood's end is presaged in this fall, 'instead of a marvellous lightship, I salvaged a dirty hulk'. Section 7, 'Patrick and Oisín', draws the first movement of Stations to a close with the 'tenebrous conversation' (pre-echoes of Hill) of these representatives of Catholic and Irish myth. Heaney learns the catechism - 'its woodcut mysteries and polysyllabic runs' - by rote, its luxuriant diction overlaid by the more natural accretions of reality, 'neighbours names seeded and uncurled upon their tongues'. Similarly the childrens' raised hands are 'tendrils', spiritual growth or forced hothouse flowers, which reach into acquiescence. Nevertheless, just as Irish peasant life is a 'back-biting undergrowth mantling the hard stones' of Catholic dogma, so, as spiritual 'night wore on', Heaney overlays these childhood parrotings with the accretions of experience, natural as green vegetation, the graveyard of imposed myth gone back to seed and sweet decay;

'The phrases that had sapped my concentration atrophied, incised tablets mossed and camouflaged by parasites and creeping greenery,'¹⁷⁰.

It is time for the young poet to be educated into the political realities which underlie these matters of faith, the sectarian war already prepared for in 'Waterbabies', the opening of the 'sluice-gates', the toppling of the pump.

Section 8, 'Sweet William', finds a symbol for this bitter sectarianism in the plant world, not the unearthly beauty of wild primroses as in 'Hedge-school' but the exotic, and imported, richness of sweet william, pregnant with menace and alien to the 'gloomy damp' of Ireland's garden (but not its 'shbt leck's)

'their blooms infused themselves into the eye like blood in snow, as if the clumped growth had been spattered with grapeshot and bled from underneath',¹⁷¹.

Naming is power, and it is another epiphany that this plant's name recalls another misnamed sweet William, Prince of Orange whose victory at the Boyne in 1690 both saved his own throne and established Protestantism as the dominant faith in Ireland. This 'heraldry' of beauty growing from violence - a king whose 'crinkling feminine black curls reached after the unsheathed flare of his sword' - is unacceptable, an aura, both in plant and man, which 'could be and would be resisted'. This resistance comes increasingly to be the major theme of Stations but first Heaney dredges up the memory of a victim of previous warfare, testimony to the legacy of pain that such conflict bestows, in section 9, 'The discharged soldier'. The disfigurement of old Pew, 'stamping the parish with his built-up hoof, proffering the black spot of his mouth', seems a ritual one, his 'artesian and desolate wailing' drunken testimony (of the one survivor) to a horror which others have 'moulded over so that it was years before I could stare long and sadly into its gules'. Ancient battle is reduced to a 'yarn', albeit one which the 'godless' Danny undermines with his darkness, another kind of childhood reminiscence - football in the back streets -

'inflated and kicked between them like the pig's bladder they declared an infallible diversion of their youth',¹⁷².

Football, however, recurs in the following section, 'The Sabbath-breakers' not as a recreation but as itself part of battle, 'flung like a gauntlet in the Sabbath air'. This tournament is a 'pattern' of resistance to the Protestant observance of Sunday as a day of rest - its organisers 'a band of brothers' recalling heroic feats, the spectators 'bare-headed' to the recital of rebel songs before the kick-off - but this in turn calls for an answering 'pattern' of oppression, a symbolic 'pogrom'. The pitch is razed during the night by

men equally entrenched in history, 'what roundhead elders, what maypole hackers'. Nevertheless, the 'sabbath-breakers' remain 'implacable', facing danger undaunted each week as a symbolic act towards the future, 'we stared into the pennanted branches and held the tableau'. Nature and native resistance coalesce - the tricolour raised 'in the chestnut tree', loudspeakers 'pouting from the hedge like iron honeysuckles' - and symbol becomes reality, 'we lived there too'.

War is also rehearsed in the next two sections. 'Kernes' - recalling Heaney's exile later as 'a wood-kerne/escaped from the massacre'^{I73} - sees the setting up of another totem, here the union jack, 'candystriped red, white and blue, ringed with influence like a fairy thorn', its champion a trainee Ulster loyalist, 'a saddled declamatory king of the castle'. As with the policeman in 'A Constable Calls', the boy's bicycle is symbol here for English dominance, 'chrome insignia and rivetted breastplate of Sir Walter Raleigh' in his inflated knickers'^{I74}, and it is at this target that Heaney and his school friends throw, significantly, Irish earth, 'a small arsenal of sods from the green verge'. Again, like earlier kernes, foot soldiers, the Irish disappear, unruffled, into this native landscape to fight another day, 'we melted down lanes and over pads', when the English are not so safe in 'sanctuary', state and farm, 'newly painted flagpole' and 'their yard gate'. In section I2, however, 'July', it is the Protestants who again threaten devastation, assert their dominance. Returning to the subject of 'Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966', Heaney again sees the violence of this drumming as presaging real violence, just as the sky grows 'dark, cloud-barred, a butcher's apron', like water downstream from slaughter 'skeins of blood still lazing in the channel'. The sunset mirrors this bloodlust, a red sea across which the drummers 'led a chosen people through their dream' - another promised land - a fire flanked by policemen 'like anthracite'. This drumming at first seems a light murmuring to Nature - 'as if the dome of air were lightly hailed to' - but becomes primeval, a cry for destruction taken up by the whole land, 'the hills were a bellied sound-box resonating, a low dyke against diurnal roar, a tidal wave that stayed, that still might open'^{I74}. Ireland itself becomes a drum, summoning warfare. It is soon answered.

The next three sections consider this warfare - Heaney, born in 1939, was of course a child of the Second World War - not directly as between England and Germany but in the way that this is refracted in the continuing hostility between the British and the Catholic Irish. 'England's Difficulty' suggests, through its title, the lack of relevance of this conflict to the Irish, at least in their own eyes. The poet moves 'like a double agent among the big concepts', believing neither in distant enemies or the 'autonomous ignorance' of his countrymen, who glory in the bombing of Belfast because the 'bitter Orange parts were hit the worst' and praise the broadcasts of Lord Haw-Haw on the ancient family radio as if they 'absolved Stuttgart and Leipzig'. Heaney's memories are more visual, the 'sky glowing over Anahorish' after a bombing raid, itself counterpart, and bitter fruit, of the blood-lust of the previous poem. He lives among self-confessed traitors, 'the scullions outside the walls', their role verbal rather than active, self appointed experts - 'squires of the cockpit, barkers of auction notices, arbitrators of the burial grounds' - and Heaney passes uneasily between these and the loyalists, joining neither,

'An adept at banter, I crossed the lines with carefully enunciated passwords, manned every speech with checkpoints and reported back to nobody'¹⁷⁵.

In section 14, 'Visitant', an 'enemy' is finally encountered, but has none of the connotations expected in the previous poem, 'the toothed efficiency of a mowing machine', here 'released from its distorting mirror'. The nameless ogre of 'Parole' or 'POW' becomes an 'awkwardly smiling foreigner' who 'gentled' the afternoon visit, adept at building 'ships in bottles, the Tyrol landscape globed in electric bulbs'. Like Ulster, he moves back 'into the refining lick of the grass', scattering myths of 'captor and harbourer' by his very complexity, 'treading the air of the image he achieved, released to his fatigues' (both exhaustion and the civilian work to which this prisoner of war is set). If this poem presages peace between German and Irishman so section 15, 'Trial Runs' brings hope of reconciliation between Protestant and Catholic, the demobbed soldier bringing back for Heaney's father a present of rosary beads, long enough to 'harness a donkey' and supposedly stolen from the 'pope's dresser'.

Such harmless banter is really a mutual coming to terms, as unexpected as the appearance of the slogan 'welcome home ye lads of the eighth army' among sectarian slogans, tentative moves towards unity (yet to be consummated),

'Their laughter sailed above my head, a hoarse clamour, two big nervous birds dipping and lifting, making trial runs over a territory',¹⁷⁶.

The remaining poems of Stations move away from this hopefulness, following the young poet in his exile, away from home, in Belfast, from country to city, tracing his own unease. Section I6, 'The Wanderer' sets this point of transition in the context of Anglo-Saxon poetry - the title is not accidental - a kind of mock inflation which cauterises any self-pity which could otherwise have crept in, -and yet which also stresses the epic context of the whole work. (as with Mercian Hymns fragmented into modernity). It is summer again - the 'sun's magnet' in 'Branded', the sunlight of 'Sinking the Shaft', the heat of 'July' and the 'heat tremor' of 'Visitant' - and this again presages either violence or change; here just as it makes the 'bean' 'split its stitches' in a classroom jamjar so it nurtures the young Heaney. The silver his 'father jangled in the previous poem now crosses the palm of this scholarship winner, the poet set apart from his more rooted contemporaries, sent 'back to your places'. Reflecting back over his subsequent 'migrant solitude', Heaney recalls what this 'ring-giver' has bequeathed him in a moving catalogue of loss, future bitterness -

'I have seen halls in flames, hearts in cinders, the benches filled and emptied, the circles of companions called and broken. That day I was a rich young man, who could tell you now of flittings, night-vigils, let-downs, women's cried-out eyes',¹⁷⁷.

Even if this is rhetoric it is still magnificent. Section I7 describes the start of this exile, the same boarding school evoked in 'The Ministry of Fear'. The sunlight of the previous poem is now 'calloused in the leaded panes of the college chapel', rationed by 'lights out', diction and elbows tested against the weight of tradition. This ever present sense of the past affects the whole poem, its very title, 'Cloistered' both medieval and imprisoning, the six years spent at St Columba's a 'book of hours' which calendars 'rite and pastime' and freezes the whole both in time and cold, Heaney's hand 'as a scribe's in winter' (as in 'Patrick and Oisín' where Father Hughes 'clapped the frost out of his

gloves', the chill of religious instruction). Heaney remains aloof and cunning however, revising the stars each dark night, breaking the ice on his 'enamelled water-jug with exhilarated self-regard', victor at examinations. He treats intellectual striving as another form of war, hot against the frozen perils prepared for by the Anglo-Saxon strictures of the previous poem, still 'scalding with lust inside my daunting visor'. Education is another part of the battle, a tournament with the goal of eventual escape.

Alternate routes for this escape are plotted in the following three poems, into political myth, into native folklore and, of more direct benefit, away from sectarian violence. 'Ballad', eighteenth in the sequence, celebrates the melancholy strains of Irish folksong, 'the manifold griefs of chanters and assuaging bows', but casts doubt over the use of these same elements to mythologise those who have died fighting the British, forerunners of the provisional I.R.A. The young Heaney is at first transfixed by these rebel songs, the tale of violence so baldly told in the first stanza here - 'they left him dying there on the cold floor of a barn' - shorn of its treachery and made an anthem, 'an insubstantial wound we dipped in beyond question and doubting'. Like the 'arbitrators of the burial grounds' in 'England's difficulty', the audience sit in a hall 'dark and close as a gravewatcher's hut', the stage an 'honoured tomb', and derive comfort from these memorials of violence, 'the song and anthem of applause had sowed us all with quiet'. Art is less damaging than war, these celidhes better than earlier conflict, ended now 'exhaustion had been nominated peace', but this new religion of blood, 'host on the singer's tongue', sets up future bitterness, endless replays of the violence and waste of the 'ascetic' boy's needless, unromanticised death. Just as unsatisfactory, though more fulfilling, is the escape attempted in section 19, 'The stations of the west', the record of a journey to the Western Isles, home of the surviving Gaelic culture. Heaney's earlier concern for language turns round on him as he fails to learn enough Irish to properly communicate, 'homesick for a speech I was to extirpate', though that he listens to this Celtic tongue in twilight seems to be an unintended refinement. Just as he was unable, ultimately, to go along with the religion of violence in the previous poem, here Heaney cannot adopt

the creed of primitive nationhood, however much 'visionaries'... mixed the dust of croppies' graves with the fasting spittle of our creed and annointed my lips'. Similarly, he receives no pentecostal 'gift of tongues' in that 'upper room where allaround me seemed to prophesy'. What does stay with the poet is a more intangible, but deep-rooted, sense of nationhood -much as he took genuine melancholy and assuagement from the songs in the previous poem - the wild beauty of the West, untarnished and genuine ground-(literally) for faith,

'But still I would recall the stations of the west, white sand, hard rock, light ascending like its definition over Rannafast and Errigal ... names portable as altar stones, unleavened elements',¹⁷⁸.

Section 20, 'Inquisition', presents a more immediate form of escape, away from proffered violence, the poet questioned in a privy by three drunken Protestants (through passwords) as to his religion, but, as in 'Trial Runs', there is at least the possibility of future reconciliation, 'what does it matter where we go on Sundays as long as we can still enjoy ourselves'. Heaney is too glad to escape incarceration, held in a grip 'alive with some pincer alphabet', to reply, indeed his reaction could either be seen as simple flight (seeing only his back) or a refusal to commit himself (showing a false face),

'The door was unexpectedly open and I showed them the face in the back of my head',¹⁷⁹.

This uncertainty becomes the theme of the final section of Stations, 'Incertus', a kind of addenda to the sequence for it presents not an epiphany but a final musing. From the 'he' of the early sections to the 'I' of the later, Heaney disguises himself in this uncertainty, both a 'shy soul' fretting over his race and an expert in 'obeisance', both concerned and cunning. Like man in the riddle of the Sphinx, Heaney 'crept before I walked' but this also carries the sense of creeping as cringing, flattering, an 'old pseudonym' which still lies over his efforts like a shroud, planned duplicity, adjunct of many deaths, lying over the poet still 'like a mouldering tegument'. All is still unresolved. Stations is an astonishing work, Heaney's most perfect (given its limited range) lacking the verbal inflation to which he is sometimes prone and treating the bitter cross-currents of modern Ireland with humour, clarity of description

and an autobiographical candour different but equal to the expression of these themes in Wintering Out and North. It is a great pity that this sequence is not more widely available for, with the two collections just mentioned, it contains Heaney's most enduring work (so far, at least), an employment of native legends and folklore to bring into focus the sad complexities of the contemporary situation which still afflicts his homeland, an archetype of violence.¹⁸⁰

In the most illuminating interview which Heaney has yet given - already quoted for his views on Stations - the poet clarifies, in particular, his attitude to Catholicism - 'it was part of the texture of growing up ... my sensibility was formed by the dolorous murmurings of the rosary, and the generally Marian quality of devotion' - and the anthropology of legend, art as a kind of resuscitation, a coming to life.

'I think there's some kind of psychic energy that cries out for a house, and you have to build the house with the elements of your poetry ... which have to have a breath of life in them.'¹⁸¹

Heaney makes a crucial distinction between the feminine basis of Irish Catholicism - itself 'continuous with something older than Christianity' ('Patrick and Oisín' again) - and the masculine, sternly moral, approach of Protestantism, the dark nativity of Antaeus and the colonising intelligence of Hercules, South and North. Significantly, Heaney, who ended North with a poem set in exile in the south, records here his move, in 1972, from Belfast to rural retreat in Wicklow and, four years later, a resumption of his teaching career at a Catholic training college. Accordingly, Heaney's most recent collection, Field Work¹⁸² sees southern landscape and farming recalled in the conviviality of city Dublin, just as northern pastorals were earlier created in troubled Belfast. The poet himself heralds a second major phase in his poetry, 'longer, more orchestrated' than the four volumes written in the North. Certainly Heaney's stay in Wicklow produced both new peace of mind - 'spiritually I felt terrifically steadied' - and two major projects which both, in different ways, presented means of coming to terms with the past, a translation of the Middle Irish romance Buile Shuibhne¹⁸³ and Stations, the final laying of the ghosts of childhood whose remembered tensions fuelled much of Heaney's best early work. What is not yet certain, considering the slowness of much of Field Work, is

whether Heaney can find a theme of equivalent depth and seriousness.

Field Work does not fulfil this hope: it is occasional verse both literally, with six formal elegies and a translation from Dante, and metaphorically, for the poems rarely stray too far from the prosaic. Heaney largely abandons his interest in legend and pre-history to return to the concerns of Death of a Naturalist, immersion in Nature and yet caution at its more sinister manifestations, an avoidance of the brutal incursions of the outside world. What is new is a trust in married love, a greater domesticity expressed in a gentle, unstrained kind of verse best achieved in 'Glanmore Sonnets'. The epiphanies of Stations have left their mark, both in this new sureness of touch and in isolated details - the sandmartins of 'Nesting-ground' relocated in 'Homecomings' the May altar of 'Hedge-school' recalled, as proof of rebirth, in 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge'. It is, however, the direct treatment of the 'Troubles' that marks Heaney's boldest advance in Field Work even if it is still, at times, emasculated. In 'The Toome Road', for example, the incursion of the army on Irish peasant life brings its own kinds of violence, 'sowers of seeds, erectors of headstones', death entering into the very fabric of society. It is this everyday atrocity, the obverse of the domesticity celebrated elsewhere, which makes Heaney's elegies so moving, just as it is his underlying faith in the strength of peasant society, the 'untoppled omphalos', which redeems them. 'Casualty', for example, is a kind of postscript to 'A Lough Neagh Sequence', the dead man taking on the qualities of the eels he once pursued - 'drinking 'like a fish', 'swimming towards the lure/of warm lit-up places', even his mourners 'shoaling out of his lane'. He dies, ironically, by breaking 'our tribe's complicity', 'remorse fused by terror' for ignoring a curfew following 'Bloody Sunday'. The poet remembers with gratitude 'his quiet craft - 'smile as you find a rhythm' - even if he still cannot provide explanations, 'puzzle me/ the right answer to that one'. 'In Memoriam Sean O'Riada', tribute to a man 'more falconer than fisherman', stresses both the rewards and dangers of any human effort, 'trusting the gift/risking gift's undertow'. It is this sense of waste and personal loss which makes these poems so moving, rich potential brought to nothing by meaningless violence, field work ending in the grave.

Other poems make the point with more immediacy. In 'A Postcard from North Antrim', this 'prince of no-man's land', a 'drop-out' from Irish society, is nevertheless killed by it, 'your candid forehead stopped/a pointblank teatime bullet'. Heaney celebrates his gifts, both clown and 'social worker of the town', and the healing force of his folksong (so reminiscent of an earlier decency, 'independent, rattling non-transcendent Ulster) which 'got my arm around Marie's shoulder/for the first time'. Such beneficence - 'splashing out the wine' - seems too vital to have been destroyed, and the poet makes Sean live again in his elegy, 'get up from your blood on the floor'. Folksong, the musical setting of native legend, is again celebrated in 'The Singer's House' (shorn of its capacity to provoke conflict as displayed in 'Ballad' from Stations), art encompassing physical labour - digging again - 'a hint of the clip of the pick/in your winnowing climb and attack'. These ballads can evoke tribal memories, 'like water hitting off granite', in an age of obsolescence and waste, 'so much comes and is gone/that should be crystal and kept. Music, and poetry itself, has lost this supernatural dimension, an art which seals, the supposed harbingers of dead souls, would swim to see, 'song/a rowboat far out in evening'. Another dead soul is celebrated in 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge', victim of an earlier war. The continuing life of the countryside - Heaney's aunt herding cows, Ledwidge's courting 'at the seaside', his later 'ghosting the trenches with a bloom of hawthorn' - is contrasted with trench war, -shrapnel, big strafe, putting 'the candles out in Ypres - and, in death, Ledwidge returns to the home he never really left, 'my soul is by the Boyne, cutting new meadows'. As a Catholic he was never fully accepted by those he died for, the 'sure confusing drum', 'not keyed and pitched like these true blue ones', but this he could neither understand - 'I am sorry/that party politics should divide our tent' - or resolve, except in death, for 'all of you consort underground'. Heaney suddenly makes sense of his own childhood memories, his walks along 'the Portstewart prom', a country boy at the seaside, the statues which commemorated this ancient war, 'the bronze soldier' who 'hitches a bronze cape ... forever craned/over Flanders'. As this poem shows, Heaney can still best deal with the present in terms of the past, for there is a kind of emotional truth here absent in a more directly polemical work.

'Triptych', an attempt to approach the 'Troubles' directly, rather than through autobiography or the past, is a case in point; there seems to be some kind of discontinuity between willed effect and the poet's real feelings, seen in an uncharacteristic clumsiness of style. Part I, 'After a Killing', seems to escape its own title, rejecting the 'neuter original loneliness' of modern Ulster, the killers 'profane and bracing as their instruments', for symbols of rural renewal - 'the pined for, unmolested orchid' - and wholeness - mackerel, vegetables 'with the tops and mould still fresh on them'. The implications raised, that Ireland was created by such 'unquiet founders' and that memories of earlier rebels 'hatched' these modern terrorists, that 'bracing' means 'invigorating' as well as 'giving rigidity', are not answered. 'Sibyl' does attempt to provide an overview, an explosion of rhetoric 'as forgotten water in a well might shake', but this outburst is distraught, unlikely - one prefers the 'swung relaxing hinge' of the poet's voice to this prediction of 'Saurian relapses'. The comparisons are too forced, matched by a coarseness of language unthinkable in earlier poems, 'the fouled magma incubate', Ireland as a reversal of the magic island of the Tempest, 'full of comfortless noises',

'The ground we kept our ear to for so long
is flayed and calloused, and its entrails
Tented by an impious augury'¹⁸⁴.

'At the Water's Edge', again, the discontinuity between the past, - crumbling 'carved monastic heads', Boia the 'god-eyed, sex-mouthed stone', 'trepanned' divinity - and the present - the army helicopter, the poet's wish to abase himself 'to go barefoot, foetal and penitential' - is too great, the memory of a similar helicopter at Newry, shadowing 'the scared, irrevocable steps', too coincidental, too forced into significance. Quieter, but far more moving, is 'The Strand at Lough Beg', the best modulated poem in Field Work, where Colum McCartney's death, a cold-blooded slaughter at the hands of terrorists, is redeemed through myth. Like Sweeney, Colum flees from 'bloodied heads, / goat-beards and dogs eyes in a demon pack', finding instead a 'faked road block', guns not of 'duck shooters' (even these spent cartridges scared him, 'acrid, brassy, genital') but of terrorists, 'heads hooded'. He dies through accident, 'you weren't known and far from what you knew', the 'old language of conspirators' no longer of use.

Heaney reconstructs this pointless death in his imagination - 'to find you on your knees/with blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes' - and kneels in homage, making his own recompense, a funeral set among native fertility,

'I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
Green scapulars to wear over your shroud'¹⁸⁵.

Elsewhere, Heaney's approach to the past seems, as in 'Triptych', somewhat blunted - in 'Oysters' he has to, literally, digest it, tasting the 'salty Pleiades', the 'frond-lipped, brine stung/glut of privilege' earlier exported to Rome, just as he drinks in 'poetry or freedom/leaning in from sea'. 'Leavings' presents the forces of history as a kind of ritual burning, the firing of crops recalling Thomas Cromwell 'scalding on cobbles/each one a broken statue's head'. As in Death of a Naturalist, Heaney seems most at ease dealing with contemporary problems by presenting them in animal guise, moralised Nature. In 'The Badgers', these nocturnal visits, 'soft returning', could either symbolise the recent 'murdered dead' or commemorate less recent victims when 'windows stood open',

'some violent shattered boy
nosing out what got mislaid
between the cradle and the explosion'¹⁸⁶,

but 'visitations are taken for signs', the badgers' return marked by their 'carcasses'. Heaney feels more fear than honour, for this 'bogey' stands also for himself, 'not at all what he's painted' (the duplicities of Stations), and that peasant heritage which he has escaped, 'the unquestionable houseboy's shoulders/that could have been my own'. Conversely, 'The Otter' presents an image of continuance, 'surfacing and resurfacing again/this year and every year since', an 'otter of memory' which by its very liveness avoids the symbolism which the poet wishes to place on it. Most tender of all is, surprisingly enough, 'The Skunk', an image of devotion - 'I had to lay her...to rest...allay her'¹⁸⁶.

Like the otter it resists categorisation, 'mythologized, demythologized', a memory stirred by the poet's wife, both ridiculous in her skunk-like 'head-down tail-up' hunt for similarly black plumage and a sudden object of tenderness, the poet at last realizing what is properly mysterious, precious,

'After eleven years, I was composing
Love-letters again, broaching the word wife'¹⁸⁷.

In 'The Guttural Muse' this new acceptance of small assuagements, the touch of 'soft-lipped life', is extended to Heaney's native dialect - so important an archeology of the Irish race - here compared to a natural healer, the tench

'Once called the 'doctor fish' because his slime
Was said to heal the wounds of fish that touched it,'¹⁸⁸.

This redemption does not, unfortunately, extend to the poet's own sense of language, the slackness which disfigures parts of Field Work seen here in a certain verbosity and lack of definition - the clumsy repetition of 'fish' above, the imprecision of 'I smelt the heat of the day', the banality of 'and watched a young crowd leave the discotheque'. Conversely, Heaney increasingly celebrates language as a form of purity, the desire in 'Oysters' for a proper appreciation of Nature to 'quicken me all into verb, pure verb', the respect for Robert Lowell as both friend and fellow poet - himself 'master elegist' - in 'Elegy'. Lowell's perception, the 'fish-dart of your eyes', unites him with oyster, tench and the victim of 'Casualty', but he is more, an artist whose 'dorsal nib' is ship as well as fish - exploring emotion as well as swimming in it - 'our night ferry/thudding in a big sea'. Riding the 'swaying tiller' of self, Lowell chides the younger poet, 'ribbing me/about my fear of water', but Heaney growingly distrusts his art, a poet losing faith in his own poetry now that he has stripped it of the framework of native legend. 'Ugolino' presents, fairly directly, the work of an earlier poet, derived (as was the epigram to 'The Strand at Lough Beg') from Dante, though couched in a strange, bastardised, form of terza rima. Set in the ninth circle of hell, reserved for traitors, Ugolino endlessly consumes the 'spattered carnal melon' of Archbishop Roger's skull, 'like a dog's teeth clamping round a bone'. The Irish situation is surely referred to here - clothed in myth - the 'two beserks' of 'Summer 1969' fighting in a bog, the victim of starvation (remembered from 'At a Potato Digging') avenging his dead children 'like a famine victim at a loaf of bread'. 'An Afterwards' defines the same situation further, the poet's wife consigning poets to the same stretch of hell, their bickering fastened into a 'rabid egotistical daisy chain'. Heaney himself, again totemised as a badger, has dodged his family responsibilities for the 'sulphurous news of poets and poetry', aspiring to a 'kind, indifferent ... tact'

ignoring wife, children and 'green land' for wasted intellect, 'you left us first, and then those books, behind'. Poetry should, instead, yield to duty.

This theme, domesticity preferred to the claims of art, gradually takes over Field Work, both faithful to the admonishment ... Remember the Giver' in 'A Drink of Water' and a correlative of the sense of loss expressed in the earlier elegies. Loss sharpens the sense of what is most enduring, love and Nature. 'High Summer' presents another, belated, door into the dark, 'old harness, ledges, shelves, the smell of hay and silage', a temporary escape from Ulster, but the bitterness of the region, le 'pays basque', is prefigured - like that of Ireland - in auguries, the tantrums of Heaney's son, maggots like a 'police force run amok', 'calvaries' which 'sentry the crossroads like masts'. In 'September Song', the 'hedge-school' of Wicklow is, more reluctantly, taken leave of, testing the 'grieving registers for joy' with music, once an 'American wake' played by 'Hammond, Gunn and McAloon', now a record by John Field. Moving house and the changing seasons coalesce in a moment of stasis, 'the middle of the way', 'we toe the line/between the tree in leaf and the bare tree'. Heaney makes it his duty to preserve, by capturing in verse, such moments, just as the maker of 'The Harvest Bow' gleans 'the unsaid off the palpable' and uses his art to crystallise the mellowness of autumn, both sinister and comforting, 'a drawn snare' which yet affirms 'the end of art is peace'. Heaney attempts, as in 'Song', to combine the 'mud flowers of dialect' with the 'immortelles of perfect pitch', -the rowan and the alders - symbolic forms with natural truth;

'... that moment when the bird sings very close
to the music of what happens'¹⁸⁹.

'Polder' locates such truth in married love, surviving 'sudden outburst' of passion like reclaimed land - 'all its salty grass and mud-slick banks' - resisting encroachments of the sea. 'Bosom' puns both on calm water and the poet's wife, 'hooped' in Heaney's 'caliper embrace', who in turn brings stability, a solid 'creel of roots' to strengthen this new earth, old love. The title poem, 'Field Work', presents love as a secret birthmark, a wound almost, just as knowledge of the 'breast's mauve star' in 'A Dream of Jealousy' brought a hurt not soothed by either art or 'prudence'. Heaney watches his distant wife with the 'perfect

eye' of both poet and Nature - 'nesting blackbird', 'big-eyed cattle' - images of domesticity and fertility, 'one fern ... always green', crystallised by his wife hanging out washing, 'vaccination mark/stretched on your upper arm'. This is matched, in section II, by a 'dryad's' wound on her thigh, 'healed into the bark' - tree metamorphosised into woman - a 'small and far' moon on which to set the course of their marriage, set in the 'mothering smell of wet and ring-wormed chestnuts'. Section III characterises love not as wound but season, rejecting autumn, winter and summer for spring's potential, the 'sunflower, dreaming umber', 'earth-drawn', again 'all mouth and eye'. The fourth, and final section draws these motifs together, love's wound redeemed by the natural world, the poet presenting the rich stain of blackcurrant juice, 'anointed/leaf shape', to his wife as a token of affection, herself - like the sunflower - 'umber', 'stained to perfection'. This genuine tenderness, the legends of Ireland rejected for the realities of love, also characterises 'Glanmore Sonnets', the most encouraging pointer in Field Work to Heaney's new direction, an acceptance of the brutalities of Nature which nevertheless subverts them through affection.

Heaney has elsewhere described his aim in 'Glanmore Sonnets' as writing

'about choice and commitment ... in the sonnets I learned something of how to speak in the first person out of the self ... there's no reason why benign emotions shouldn't be able to find utterance'¹⁹⁰.

Their most endearing, and enduring, characteristic is a return, grateful now, to the earth, the native land of Ireland which the poet earlier and so bitterly rejected, the exile returned home. With these sonnets the circle is complete (to begin turning again?) the naturalist reborn, freed from dark and winter. Sonnet I celebrates this new awareness, words and land ploughed back to fertility,

'Now the good life could be to cross a field
And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe
Of ploughs'¹⁹¹.

The 'comet's pulsing rose' missed at the end of North is now granted, the poet quickened by the 'fundamental dark unblown rose', the ground again 'opened', and the father not escaped in 'Follower' assuaged by this 'dream grain'. Heaney can at last face up to his past without fear, 'breasting the mist, in sowers' aprons/ my ghosts come striding in their spring stations', the ground 'opened' again.

Sonnet two repeats the same analogy (and opening line), writing as sowing seed,

'Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground,

Each verse returning like the plough turned round',¹⁹².

Words are a search for 'sensings', instruments in the dark which seek perfection of expression where art yields to truth, stone which 'connived with the chisel' because craftsmanship is so in tune with its medium, 'not secrets but mysteries'. Similarly, Heaney seeks a genuine voice for his poetry, one, in tune with the natural world, that can echo back 'off slug-horn and slow chanter' and thus become a healing force, able to 'hold, dispel, appease'. In sonnet III this wished-for poetry is reflected back in the 'cadences' of Nature - the iambic consorting of cuckoo and corncrake, the wind that 'rustles and relents', the wild sounds of rabbit and deer. Heaney and his wife are themselves part of this 'strange loneliness', an imitation of Wordsworthian solitude. Signs are granted when least expected; in sonnet IV the poet puts his ear to the railway line of 'Dawn Shoot' and 'Field Work', seeking another kind of rhythm, but the epiphanies granted are visual - the elemental horse of 'Branded', a 'grey turnover of haunch and mane', his future wife, seen only, a breeze rippling across water. These ripples are now transformed into emotion, 'shaking ... across my heart', as orderly as the plough-furrows in sonnet II and as mysterious as creation, natural or literary, vanishing 'into where they seemed to start'. The following sonnets delve further, like Stations, into the poet's memories, recovering this buried treasure. Sonnet V, for example, is a kind of secular hymn to a 'boortree', now now sprouting 'green young shoots' but heir to past richness, both elderberry wine and young love, 'bower tree, where I ... felt another's texture quick on me'. Heaney watches another Spring with hidden knowledge, 'etymologist of roots and graftings', an acceptance of the rhythms of Nature which is borne out in the remaining five sonnets, lessons taught by this 'hedge-school'.

Elderflowers recur in sonnet VI, a search for yet clearer expression,

'I will break through' he said, 'what I glazed over

With perfect mist and peaceful absences',¹⁹³.

The exemplar here is a man who cycled over the frozen river Moyola, a feat which 'quickened' the young Heaney in a cold season 'where things might crystallize

or founder'. Similarly comforting are, bizarrely, the radio gale warnings in sonnet VII, collapsing local regions into a 'sibilant penumbra', siren call of the 'whale road' (the Anglo-Saxon of 'The wanderer' again). The local bay becomes a 'haven', shelter from these distant, anticipated, storms, its captive sea toiling 'like mortar'. With sonnet VIII this storm arrives over the poet's cottage, 'spattering dark on the hatchet iron', bringing with it elements of destruction and decay (which earlier collections could not assimilate),

'I thought of dew on armour and carrion.

What would I meet, blood-boltered, on the road,¹⁹⁴.

Toads, whatever it is that 'welters through this dark hush on the crops', the fairy tale witch who rocks a baby mongol on her lap, all are archetypal - creatures of winter and storm - and only a loved one can disperse the spell, 'come to me quick'. The horrors continue in sonnet IX, the wilderness outside presenting a 'black rat ... on the briar like infected fruit' (unlike in 'An Advancement of Learning' such evil is too strong to be made pathetic). This genuine wildness invalidates the Heaney's retreat into their literary idyll, a 'classical' bay tree at the gate, infecting it with reality, the brutality of country life evoked first in Death of a Naturalist and again here -

'Blood on a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay

Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing,¹⁹⁵.

Echoing Sidney, Heaney asks himself 'what is my apology for poetry' for he can offer his wife no comfort, the rat gone, her frightened face haunting him 'like a new moon glimpsed through tangled glass',¹⁹⁶ impossible to reach. Sonnet X provides for reconciliation, another kind of 'exposure' to that which concluded North. Heaney and his wife become themselves archetypal, figures from myth - 'Diarmuid and Grainne' - in the poet's dream, open to the air in a 'cold climate', rehearsing an early love which has led, gradually, to a mature acceptance

'To raise us towards the lovely and painful

Covenants of flesh; our separateness:

The respite in our devy, dreaming faces,¹⁹⁷.

The poet's natural reticence lifts here to reveal delicate emotion, tenderness banishing the darker visions, 'laid out/like breathing effigies on a raised ground', for a belief in the healing beneficence of love. In 'Glanmore Sonnets'

Heaney has gone a good way towards achieving a new Dantean richness, poetry 'in the highest, widest, deepest sense, comforting'¹⁹⁸.

Heaney recently expanded on his intentions in Field Work as a whole¹⁹⁹, seeing it as a journey into light and away from the earthy preoccupations of his earlier verse - 'I'm fed up with doors into the dark, I want a door into the light' - to a new contemporary approach, 'closer to a social life'. Heaney now wishes not to surrender to the drift of syntax but to push it. He must make himself 'declare as much as cajole', recognising that in a time of civil war 'to sing is not an affront but an affirmation of something else ... a haven of truth'. Certainly there are epiphanies of light in the collection - the 'clear light' of 'Oysters', the 'early mist' and dew in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' which presages a hopeful dawn, the 'dawn-sniffing revenant' of 'Casualty', the 'minnow of light' in 'In Memoriam Sean O'Riada' and the 'breaking sheaf of light' in 'Leavings' - but they do not add up, thematically or emotionally, in the same way that images of darkness do in his earlier collections. Heaney has not yet found a new, brighter archetype on which to base his work equivalent to that of the dark concurrences of legend, of tribal disarray.

It remains my contention that Field Work, though 'Glanmore Sonnets' may well presage greater poetry to come, is a transitional and largely disappointing book. The poet has abandoned his guiding legend, that of ancient Ireland, but has, as yet, found little to replace it with. There remains a central ambivalence, 'the occasional apparent evasiveness ... a failure of compassion'²⁰⁰, and a refusal to openly condemn Catholic terrorism - 'tribal, intimate revenge'²⁰¹ - as he does the other side, a self-admitted failure to grasp 'the once-in-a-lifetime portent/the comet's pulsing rose'²⁰². Heaney is well aware of this lack of full commitment; 'angry that my trust could not repose/in the clear light'²⁰³, his tongue is the 'swung relaxing hinge'²⁰⁴ of trap-door and gallows. When words can unequivocally ferret 'themselves out of their dark hutch', then Heaney will undoubtedly become a major poet. It is his own certainty of his native legends and heritage that has allowed him to trace the roots of both his nation and himself, an archetype of unease, legend as a door into his own sense of dark, a spade to uncover the past.

'I've never felt any need to rebel or do a casting-off of God or anything like that, because I think in this day anthropologists and mythologists have taught us a lot, to live with our myths'²⁰⁶.

Notes

1. Worlds, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Harmondsworth 1974 pp 92-95.
2. Death of a Naturalist, London 1966.
3. Worlds p 94.
4. Death of a Naturalist p 14.
5. John Wilson Foster, 'The Poetry of Seamus Heaney', Critical Quarterly XVI (1976) p 35.
6. Death of a Naturalist p 23.
7. North, London 1975, p 53.
8. Death of a Naturalist p 17.
9. Ibid p 30.
10. Ibid p 32.
11. Ibid p 54.
12. Ibid p 55.
13. Ibid p 48.
14. Ibid p 51.
15. Ibid p 27.
16. Ibid p 25.
17. Boy Driving His Father to Confession, Surrey 1970.
18. Door into the Dark, London 1969, p 14. Cf the horse in 'Branded' in Stations
19. Ibid p 20.
20. Ibid p 21.
21. Ibid p 24.
22. Ibid p 26.
23. Ibid p 31.
24. Ibid p 18.
25. Ibid p 32.
26. Ibid p 36.
27. Ibid p 18.
28. Ibid p 43.
29. Ibid p 44.
30. Ibid p 45.

31. P.V.Glob, The Bog People, Denmark 1965 (as Mosefolket: Jernalderens Mennesker bevaret i 2000 Ar), London 1969. This work, subtitled 'Iron Age Man Preserved', provides a verbal and pictorial account of the findings in this century of perfectly preserved sacrificial victims, from around the Ist Century A.D., in the peat bogs of Jutland. See Haffenden (note I64) p 8-9.
32. Door into the Dark p 56.
33. Worlds p 94.
34. Wintering Out, London 1972.
35. Ibid p 5, reprinted as section IV of 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', North, London 1975 p 60.
36. John Wilson Foster, 'The Poetry of Seamus Heaney', p 35.
37. Wintering Out p 13.
38. Ibid p 14.
39. Ibid p 15.
40. Ibid p 16.
41. Ibid p 17.
42. Ibid p 18.
43. Ibid p 20.
44. Ibid p 19.
45. Ibid p 18.
46. Ibid p 20.
47. Ibid p 21.
48. Ibid p 21.
49. Ibid p 22.
50. Ibid p 24.
51. Ibid p 25.
52. Ibid p 23.
53. Ibid p 24.
54. Ibid p 25.
55. Ibid p 25.

56. Ibid p 26.
57. Ibid p 27.
58. See Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough (Abridged Ed.) London 1957, chapter I 'The King of the Wood' pp I-10; this legend, of course, underlies the whole of Frazer's monumental work.
59. Wintering Out p 28.
60. Ibid p 29.
61. Ibid p 30.
62. Ibid p 31.
63. See Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, ed Maria Leach, London 1975 (First English edition) p 966. Saint Brigit was one of the early patron saints of Ireland, but behind her scholars like Stokes have discerned (perhaps erroneously) a more ancient Celtic fertility goddess.
64. James Joyce, Ulysses, Paris 1922.
65. Wintering Out p 32.
66. Ibid p 33.
67. Ibid p 34.
68. The Gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter 16 verses 19-31.
69. The Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 11 verses 1-44.
70. Wintering Out p 35.
71. In Joyce's Ulysses, Daedalus is Telemachus to Bloom's Odysseus, a lost son,
72. Wintering Out p 37.
73. Ibid p 37.
74. Ibid p 38.
75. See G.M. Trevelyan, A Shortened History of England, Harmondsworth 1959, p 436, 'The memories of 'ninety eight' become a heirloom of hatred, cherished in every cottage, and exploited by successive generations of patriots and agitators'.
76. Wintering Out p 38.
77. Ibid p 39, see Funk and Wagnall pp 671-2 on Mandrakes.
78. Ibid p 40.
79. Ibid p 41.

80. Ibid p 42.
81. Ibid p 43.
82. Ibid p 44.
83. Ibid p 46.
84. See Glob, The Bog People, ill. I-8, pp 21-32.
85. Wintering Out p 47.
86. Ibid p 48.
87. See Glob p 104.
88. Wintering Out p 49.
89. Ibid p 50.
90. Ibid p 51.
91. Ibid p 52.
92. Ibid p 53.
93. Ibid p 58.
94. Ibid p 65.
95. Ibid p 67.
96. Heaney notes on p 9 that Maighdean Mara is the Irish for 'mermaid'.
97. Wintering Out p 70.
98. It is thought that some of the bog murders were punishments for infanticide.
99. Wintering Out p 70.
100. Ibid p 72.
101. Ibid p 75.
102. Ibid p 76.
103. Ibid p 77.
104. Ibid p 80.
105. Philip Hobsbaum, 'The Present State of British Poetry', Lines Review 45. (June 1973), quoted Foster p 46. Hobsbaum, who took the precepts of the 'Group' to Belfast and almost single-handed set up the Ulster school, was a major influence on Heaney's work.
106. Foster, 'The Poetry of Seamus Heaney', p 47.
107. Simon Curtis, 'Seamus Heaney's North', Critical Quarterly VIII (1976) p 81.

- I08. Peter Dent, 'Seamus Heaney', Agenda 13² (Summer 1975) p 61.
- I09. Stan Smith, 'Escaped from the Massacre', PN Review 2, p 63.
- II0. North, London 1975.
- III. Ibid p 9.
- II2. Ibid p 10.
- II3. For a full description of Heracles/Hercules' wrestling match with Antaeus, in some accounts one of Heracles' 12 Labours, see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Harmondsworth 1955, vol 2, pp146-147.
- II4. North p 14.
- II5. Ibid p 14.
- II6. Ibid p 16.
- II7. Ibid p 20.
- II8. Ibid p 20, 'word-hoard' is an Anglo-Saxon concept for the poet's stock in trade.
- II9. Ibid p 22.
- I20. Ibid p 22.
- I21. Ibid p 24.
- I22. 'Pampooties' here (p 24) are cowskin sandals used by prehistoric hunters to disguise the sound of their approach.
- I23. North p 27.
- I24. Ibid p 29.
- I25. Bog Poems
- I26. P.V.Glob, The Bog People.
- I27. This poem appears to the corpse of the woman staked down in the bog, found in the 19th century, and at first thought to be Queen Gunhild, the cruel consort of Erik Bloodaxe. See Glob, p 55-60 and illus. 22, 23.
- I28. North p 34.
- I29. Glob chapter 2, 'The Grauballe Man' pp33-48 and illus 9-20 seem to provide the factual basis here, the careful descriptions being best appreciated by close comparison with Glob's mysterious (and to me, at least, physically sickening in their air of violent death) photographs.
- I30. North p 36.

- I31. See Glob p 114 and illus, 38-40 for material on the girl found in the Winderby bog, thought to have been executed for adultery.
- I32. North p 38.
- I33. The title refers to an American song, written by Lewis Allen, about lynchings in the Southern states of the U.S.A., another form of communal intolerance.
- I34. See Glob p 74 and illus, 34 about the decapitated girl from Roum, a quite horrifying photograph which Heaney captures in all its sightless blankness and mystery.
- I35. North p 40.
- I36. Ibid p 42.
- I37. Ibid p 43.
- I38. See Tacitus, On Britain and Germany, transl. H. Mattingly, Harmondsworth, 1948 and Glob, pp 103-4 and passim. Tacitus was the earliest reliable historian of the Northern races, and much of what he wrote has been proved true by the discovery of the bog people.
- I39. North p 45.
- I40. Ibid p 45.
- I41. It is used at its best by some of the metaphysicals and by modern poets - Fighting Terms (London 1954) by Thom Gunn stretches this conceit almost to book length, especially in poems like 'The Beach Head'.
- I42. This anecdote is most accessible in the dramatisation of Aubrey's work which Heaney might well have seen at this time, Brief Lives, adapted by P. Garland, London 1967, pp 35-37.
- I43. See Sir Walter Raleigh, The Ocean's Love to Cynthia, the best (repunctuated) easily available text is Silver Poets of the 16th Century, ed, G. Bullett, London 1947, pp 299-313.
- I44. See Trevelyan p 265.
- I45. See Sir Walter Raleigh, 'The Shepherd's Praise of Diana', Silver Poets of the 16th Century pp 297-8.
- I46. Act of Union between England and Ireland 1801, see Trevelyan p 436. This followed the 1798 rebellion under Wolfe Tone referred to earlier in 'Linen Town', Wintering Out p 38.
- I47. North p 50.
- I48. Ibid p 52.
- I49. In Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821), poets are the 'unacknowledged legislators' of the race.

- I50. North p 60.
- I51. The epigram (and background information) here is taken from R.H.Barrow, The Romans, Harmondsworth 1949, p 101.
- I52. The epigrams here reflect these two themes, the education of a poet - from Wordsworth's more extensive account, The Prelude (1805 version) Book I, lines 305-309 - and growing political awareness, albeit of a poet who took the Protestant side, W.B.Yeats, Autobiographies,
- I53. Graham Greene, The Ministry of Fear,
- I54. North p 64.
- I55. The three unnamed paintings by Goya are (with dates of composition) 'Saturn devouring two of his sons' (1820-23), 'The Colossus, or Panic' (1808) and 'Two Peasants Fighting' (1819-23).
- I56. North p 70.
- I57. Ibid p 73.
- I58. Ibid p 70.
- I59. T.S.Eliot, Four Quartets, London 1944 (New York 1943) p 59, 'and the fire and the rose are one'.
- I60. Geoffrey Hill, Mercian Hymns, London 1971.
- I61. Stations, Belfast (Ulsterman Publications) 1975 - this pamphlet is now very difficult to locate, its original print-run and distribution being somewhat limited. This itself reflects both Heaney's own uncertainty as to the merit of the work and his fear of seeming to plagiarise the style and method of Mercian Hymns.
- I62. Ibid, p 3.
- I63. Gary Snyder, Earth House Held: technical notes and queries to fellow Dharma Revolutionaries, London 1970, a collection of earlier essays, mainly on the new tribalism.
- I64. John Haffenden, 'Meeting Seamus Heaney', London Magazine 19³ (June 1979), p20.
- I65. Stations p 3; cf Haffenden p 9, a poet must not immerse himself in work too much or he will 'close those receiving stations' on which his talent relies.
- I66. Haffendon p 20.
- I67. Stations p 5.
- I68. Ibid p 7.
- I69. Ibid p 8, of the same obsessive description in 'A Constable Calls'.

- I70. Ibid p 9.
- I71. Ibid p II.
- I72. Ibid p I2.
- I73. North p 73; the ironic reference to Raleigh recalls his betrayal of Ireland in 'Ocean's Love to Ireland'.
- I74. Stations p I5.
- I75. Ibid p I6, of the similar sense of duplicity in 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing
- I76. Ibid p I8.
- I77. Ibid p I9.
- I78. Ibid p 22.
- I79. Ibid p 23.
- I80. John Haffenden, 'Meeting Seamus Heaney', London Magazine 19³ (June 1979) pp5-28. (See note I64).
- I81. Ibid p I8.
- I82. Field Work, London 1979. 'Glanmore Sonnets' were earlier published separately as 'Hedge School'.
- I83. See Haffenden p 7, IO; this translation, 'which runs to I20 pages in manuscript', has not yet been published.
- I84. Field Work p I3, this pseudo-Shakespearian bombast is, admittedly, spoken by a persona, a modern sibyl, but it is symbolic of a looser use of language as a whole in the collection, set off by the careful style of, most notably, 'The Strand at Lough Beg' and 'Glanmore Sonnets'.
- I85. Ibid p I7. It is significant that one of the poem's best phrases, 'slow arbitrators of the burial ground', is taken verbatim from 'England's difficulty' in Stations, and this is the one elegy here to approach the taut richness of that collection.
- I86. Haffenden p 7.
- I87. Field Work p 48.
- I88. Ibid p 28, again the diction seems clumsy, even compared with Heaney's prose exposition of the same poem, Haffenden p 8-9.
- I89. Ibid p 56.
- I90. Haffenden p 25.
- I91. Field Work p 33.

- I92. Ibid p 34.
- I93. Ibid p 38.
- I94. Ibid p 40.
- I95. Ibid p 41.
- I96. Haffenden p 28, 'I had a notion of poetry being like stained glass almost, and I would like to be able to write a poetry that was like stained glass'.
- I97. Field Work p 42.
- I98. Haffenden p 21.
- I99. Interview with Heaney on the BBC Radio 4 programme Kaleidoscope, 1 Nov. 1979.
200. John Silverlight, 'Brooding Images', Observer, 11 November 1979, p 37.
Heaney describes his childhood as spent between the demesne and the bog, Moyola Park and Toome, the former 'walled, wooded, beyond our ken' the latter 'rushy and treacherous, no place for children'. Heaney sees his work as a refining of style, 'craft is developing into technique, the higher quality'.
201. North p 38.
202. Ibid p 73.
203. Field Work p 11.
204. Ibid p 13.
205. Ibid p 34.
206. Haffenden p 11. Heaney's relation to the Catholic mythology which helped shape him is best evoked in 'Romanist' (The Wearing of the Black, ed. P. Fiacc, Belfast 1974), obviously a section omitted from Stations.

'I was subjugated under arches, manumitted at a graduation ceremony, for years a humble client at the lattice of confessionals. My murex was the purple of lent on a calendar patterned with fish-days.

I knelt to take the impress of the celebrant's ashy thumb, a silk friction, the spread palps of his fingers cold as mushrooms at my temples. An infinitesimal fall of dust itched down over my nose. Stipple of the first spadeful. Memento homo quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris. / e

Caste-marked annually, I went among the freemen of the city for their inspection. In forum and theatre I felt their gaze bend to my mouldy brow and fasten like a lamprey on the mark. In vain I sought it myself on the groomed optimi, on the hammerheads of lictor and praetorian. I was estimated and enumerated with my own, indelibly one with the earth-starred denizens of catacomb and campagna'.

It is such myths that Heaney has learnt to live with.

CHAPTER THREE.

A NEW LEGEND.

THE POETRY OF GEOFFREY HILL.

Whereas Seamus Heaney developed his approach to myth gradually, Geoffrey Hill established a precocious mastery right from the earliest (scrupulously dated) poems in For the Unfallen, a sometimes over-facile virtuosity broadened out, after the endlessly reflecting mirrors of King Log, into the created legend of Mercian Hymns and the achieved mystery of Tenebrae. Hill's poetry has gained the unfortunate reputation of being scrupulous to the point of either incomprehension or impotence - the most illuminating essay on his work concerns itself principally with his use of brackets¹ - and certainly the poet carefully excludes his own emotions and any biographical revelation to an almost obsessive extent. Nevertheless, Hill's supposed difficulty has been much exaggerated, just as his delight in sly punning and sheer verbal ingenuity has been mistaken as either gnomic or arcane. The first anthologist to introduce Hill's work to a wider audience, Kenneth Allott, found

'the darkness of many of the later poems so nearly total that I can see them to be poems only by a certain quality in their phrasing...I understand 'Annunciations' only in the sense that cats and dogs may be said to understand human conversations'²,

an incomprehension scarcely helped by Hill's attempted explanation of his own poem, as strangely punctuated and bracket-ridden as his verse but substituting sophistry for cadence³. What Hill does admit is his own uncertainty both of meaning, 'I think', and of his role as poet,

'But I want the poem to have this dubious end; because I feel dubious; and the whole business is dubious'⁴.

As in his own, highly cerebral, literary criticism⁵, Hill's prose is almost too brilliant, the reader feels that not enough bridges have been built for him, that the critic is somehow stressing his own intellectual superiority and wide cultural range, a charge that could be more justly aimed at some of the other contributors to Stand⁶, the first magazine to properly champion Hill's work. Hill's poetry, conversely, has increasingly used myth to stress humility, his debt to and respect for the tradition which has created and fostered him.

Far from being a poet of wilful obscurity, Hill has constantly refined his use of myth and legend to attain a more precise clarity, difficult only for those who wish to find it so, and far removed from the enclosed, hermetic world of early poems like 'Annunciations, though retaining their beautiful compression and verbal precision. Despite Jon Silkin's insistence, in an otherwise useful essay, that Hill is a poet most exercised by the Nazi holocaust and its relation to the artist, 'the question of the private man and his public actions',⁷ a view amplified by Ricks⁸, I see Hill's real subject as far wider and more important, one which places him properly in (cautious) relation to the civilization which produced such atrocities,

'Hill is a poet of very high intelligence much exercised about the terrible injunctions and paradoxes of our Christian legacy',⁹

Hill's pared-down fragments, albeit often part of longer sequences, reflect a culture and morality shown up as hollow and false by the holocaust, but his real concern is the culture as a whole - expressed through its myths - not the terror which exposed it, not the symptoms but the underlying malaise. Yet Hill's work is, to contradict Allott, not as despairing as it may at first seem - the poet may be cautious and self-doubting, particularly about any large claim to meaning or coherence, but he is still passionately committed to expression. As Hill himself wrote about Part I of 'Annunciations'

'What I say in the section is, I think, that I don't believe in the Word. The fact that I make the poem at all means that I still believe in words',¹⁰

Hill's first collection, For the Unfallen¹¹, is partly an extended elegy for the dead - much of Hill's best work is elegiac - which reveals a passion for describing death, dissolution, blood and sacrifice in an elaborate, toughly burnished, poetic style redeemed by its quiet wit,

'The dead are my obsession this week
But may be lifted away',¹²

Hill mocks his own morbid preoccupations, but their resolution is uncertain - in a characteristic pun, whether 'may' means 'can easily' or 'might possibly' depends on the reader, not the poet. This refusal of Hill to commit himself

to direct statement can be seen either as a betrayal of his accepted role as soothsayer for the tribe - a myth-maker who fails to believe in or justify his own myths - or as a necessary caution for the creator of a world view in which morality and belief are exposed as equivocal. (Mercian Hymns resolves this central uncertainty in Hill's work by transferring this ambivalence to the historical/legendary figure of Offa and thus releasing the poet). However, For the Unfallen, for all its interest in death is dedicated to the living and the uncorrupted, 'unfallen', 'firstborn, or wise/councillor',^{I3}. Hill's real subject is the force of myth and history - usually seen in conjunction - in shaping the present world. Myth, the past and tyranny are the main concerns here, themes which later collections will deepen but not stray far from, and the personal involvement of Seamus Heaney in his work, both as individual and representative of his race, contrasts markedly with Hill's near complete self-effacement. A highly personal poem like 'The Turtle Dove' is almost indecipherable in its study of an intense, and devouring, relationship, and Hill's early work uses myth almost as an instrument of magic, through which the poet can make himself disappear, as yet daring only cold rhetoric,

'Speech from the ice, the clear-obscure;
The tongue broody in the jaw'^{I4}.

Hill's later work will turn this Wordsworthian plainness back into self-analysis, these various myths into a composite legend, based on Offa, which yet more magically explains the poet's race and, ultimately, himself.

Of the wide range of myth already mastered in For the Unfallen, Christian scripture and legend achieves an unfashionable dominance, particularly for a poet who so obviously doubts, rather than celebrates, the religious tenets which they conventionally express. Like the Old Testament, For the Unfallen opens with a creation myth, but this 'Genesis' diverges markedly from the accepted text, rejecting the 'brooding immortality' of the phoenix for 'flesh and blood and the blood's pain', reality in all its horror. Such reality demands appropriate expression - 'there is no bloodless myth will hold' - and this explains the power of the Christian sacrament - 'by Christ's blood

are men made free' - even when it has proved illusory, powerless against the energy of Nature (the real 'miracle of God') when blood and life have gone,

'Though Earth has rolled beneath her weight
The bones that cannot bear the light',¹⁵.

The sacrament, and its failure to redeem the real world through symbolism, re-occurs in 'The Bidden Guest', where the poet's intellectual belief in the tongues of flame at Pentecost fails to illuminate the service of communion. The mythic healing of the Mass, blood represented by wine, loses meaning for the poet, though not the other celebrants, 'broken mouths that spill/their hoard of prayer like beads on a board'. Both such profligacy and submissiveness are now beyond Hill, this very religiosity now seen as a temptation now defeated but not assimilated,

'And so my heart has ceased to breathe
(Though there God's worm blunted its head
and stayed)',¹⁶.

In a powerful close, the altar is shorn of its mystery, 'cold and dead', its twin candles extinguished - 'a server has put out its eyes' - and the flames of Pentecost unbidden, and the poet remains, as aloof as he at first feared, 'the heart's tough shell is still to crack'. The same opposition between warmth and cold, life and death, underlies 'In Memory of Jane Fraser', a poem of obvious, though unexplained, personal meaning to the poet¹⁷. The poem, one of great mystery and beauty, opens in the 'siege' of winter, the 'cold shroud' of snow prefiguring Jane Fraser's death which further increases this sense of paralysis, 'to chain/Creation to a stunned repose'. Nevertheless, life returns, expressed in terms of release, 'ice unloosed the brook' and return to movement, 'dead cones upon the alder shock'. What makes the dying woman heroic is her brutality against death, like the wild creatures of 'Genesis', a sense of energy missing from the rituals of 'The Bidden Guest' and here a real inspiration, a genuine mode of faith,

'We watched her brooding over death
Like a strong bird above its prey',¹⁸.

The power, or lack of it, of conventional Christian dogma is the central concern of many of the poems in For the Unfallen. 'Gods Little Mountain' reassesses the granting to Moses of the ten commandments¹⁹, for although (unlike in 'The Bidden Guest') holy fire is here granted it brings no real change, 'flame that left the air cold and engraven', and God's 'winnowing eyes' terrify rather than illuminate, 'I waited for the word that was not given. As in 'Genesis', this modern apocryphal version shows that belief has atrophied; the poet's own art is incapable of conveying insight, while no divine intervention is granted, or indeed thought possible,

'For though the head frames words the tongue has none.

And who will prove the surgeon to this stone'²⁰.

Conversely, 'Holy Thursday' presents Eden not as an ideal state of innocence before the Fall, but as the knowledge gained by the coming to experience that the fall represents, sexuality as the divine fire of the previous poem,

'But they must cleave the fire's peril

And suffer innocence to fall'²¹.

Love and sexual knowledge make truly innocent 'she ... who was my constant myth and terror', and it is the ravages of time, 'the season's sad remove', not experience which is the real 'ambush'. Fulfilled sexuality is again celebrated in 'Asmodeus'²² and seen as a true embodiment of Pentecostal fire, 'fire brought dangerously to hand/to tame, not exorcise, spirits', protecting the lovers against evil through greater strength, 'lightning conducted forcibly to the ground'. However, this strength is equivocal and in the second (highly irregular) sonnet, the 'guide-book martyr' Raphael censors truth in the cause of safety, 'closing the doors of the house and the head also'. This cunning use of biblical myth to point a moral often at odds with that originally intended, extends to Hill's treatment of the New Testament.

The poet's method is seen at its most delicate in 'Picture of a Nativity', this 'picture' acting as a frame for the action; men 'appear' - or seem - to worship, just as the protagonists 'freeze into an attitude'. Christ himself, 'dumb' as the animals around him, is born in a scene of devastation,

his 'right place' among the flotsam of Nature, like waste oil (perhaps also the wasted oil of the canvas described) 'discharged on the world's outer shores', and part of the natural, accepted, violence of 'Genesis', beasts with 'claws flesh-battered'. In the alternative meaning of 'appear', the wise men come to worship this incarnation of the ordinary, 'bestial and common hardship', and thus the miraculous. Nevertheless, the ritual worship of this child negates his very naturalness - the angels' posture and lack of motion recall the equation of cold and death in 'In Memory of Jane Fraser', just as their 'displayed' wings reinforce the sense of posing for effect,

'Freeze into an attitude
Recalling the dead'²³.

The following, and companion, poem, 'Canticle for Good Friday', follows the birth of God with his death, similarly unilluminating and static, 'Creation's issue congealing'. Both Christ and Thomas are 'staggered' by the cross, but Thomas, representative of the sceptical poet is only horrified, 'not transfigured', by the sheer brutality of the ritual. Like the beasts of the previous poem, he finds no revelation, nothing to make him shed the 'claw-roots of sense'. Christ's sacrifice; 'carrion-sustenance of staunchest love', is as unredeemed as the hollow ritual which imitates it in 'The Bidden Guest'. The equivalent tragedy of Lucifer's fall, as described in
24
'The Bibliographers', is far more appealing, an 'archaic beauty' seen in terms of light, 'blazing in superb effigies', which contrasts markedly with the 'unaccountable darkness' of Christ's death and, even in defeat, casts the sun itself into shade, 'the shadow-god envisaged in no cloud'. Similarly the saint of 'In Piam Memoriam' is, like Lucifer and Christ, an artistic construct, 'created purely from glass', but again fails to match up to his own sense of mission, 'exposing his gifted, quite empty hands'. An archetype 'stained' like the glass he is made from, this very duplicity is 'a feature for our regard'. As with 'In Memory of Jane Fraser', true revelation comes not through imposed religion but the return of Spring, reintroducing movement and life - 'the scummed pond twitches' - stripping away the 'wasted snow'

of the past, and creating a genuine, natural miracle, new life from the roots of death, a purity denied to the myths of man,

'The common, puddled substance: beneath,
Like a revealed mineral, a new earth'²⁵.

A similar ambivalence, uneasily co-existing with mastery of expression, is seen in Hill's approach to classical forms. 'A Pastoral', for example, examines the way in which myth can be used to obscure real human emotion, the horror of war and its brutality, 'the unedifying nude dead', falsified into a pastoral, fake vision, a 'new tongue' which obscures all true feeling,

'..... Here are statues
Darkened by laurel; and evergreen names;
Evidently veiled griefs, impervious tombs'²⁶.

The 'dead' themselves occur frequently in For the Unfallen, seen in 'The Distant Fury of Battle' as rejecting this embalming in myth or ritual by keeping battle formation and order even in the graveyard, 'the dead maintain their ground'. 'Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings' takes up the 'sea-preserved' motif of 'Picture of a Nativity', itself deriving from Shakespeare's The Tempest²⁷, the dead lying in self-constructed glory before the revelations of the Last Judgement, when all will come to light, 'the sea/across daubed rock evacuates its dead'. The grave again gives up its dead, this time through the poet's imagination, in 'Two Formal Elegies'. Reminders of the Nazi holocaust, when 'on the ordained day/this world went spinning from Jehovah's hand', play over modern holidaymakers stripped not for the gas chambers but the beach, the 'wide hearth' of the sea, and stress the closeness between oppressor and victim, 'at whose door does the sacrifice stand or start?'. 'The Guardians', the first of three linked poems about death by water, similarly differentiates the young, risk-takers unaware of danger, from the old, conscious of danger even in tranquility, and their quiet role as guardians (as impotent against death as the 'witnesses' of 'Two Formal Elegies') not of life but ritual, who 'gather the dead as the first dead scrape home'. 'The White Ship' considers these restless dead, aimlessly drifting 'without enrichment or decay', and at the mercy of, uncaring natural forces. However,

'Wreaths' introduces to this sense of futility the revelations of time, each daily tide bringing to light 'dead gulls, oranges, 'dead men', a growing 'understanding' which allays brutality with natural beauty and an underlying sense of coherence, 'what hurts appeased by the sea's handsomeness'. Of course this resolution is itself temporary and incomplete, just as the rich man of 'To the (Supposed) Patron', an early prototype for Offa, masters his 'prepared vistas' in a self-regarding and unconvincing, though enviable, way, his ultimate and yet most appealing folly the arranging of his own demise, 'idyllic death/where fish at dawn ignite the powdery lake'. Hill's interest in death, tied in as it is with the deaths of legend and the past, spills over into his more directly mythical early poems, invading classical themes just as in 'A Pastoral' and his attempts at formal elegy it shockingly subverted classical forms.

'Metamorphoses' again considers death in terms of the sea, as well as Ovidian transformation, Venus reborn as a 'sea-scoured temptress', Drake's drum as a call to slaughter - his sailors dissolved into 'undiscerning sea'. In section V, love is seen as a battle between sea and stone, the human spirit itself a kind of residue cast off by the elements,

'..... hammocked in salt tagged cloth
That to be bleached or burned the sea casts out',²⁸

The most surprising transformation, however, is that of section II, the scapegoat of Jewish myth transmuted into poetry which (as Hill's own does) takes on this ritual suffering and, through 'agility and passion', employing 'restraint and fervour', combines light (the sun of 'In Piam Memoriam' and 'Genesis') and reconciliation, 'make the sun your pedestal/settle all that bad blood'. 'After Cumae' ties together light and sea odysseys in terms of prophecy, the Sibyl's 'washable leaves' which direct the divine on the temporal, help teach to suffering heroes the 'curios of voyage', a freshly discovered sign of the continuing power of myth;

'And the sometimes-abandoned gods confuse
With immortal essences men's brief lives,
Frequenting the exposed and pious',²⁹

'Orpheus and Eurydice' again places classical myth in a contemporary setting, carefully listed 'protected birds' replacing the unrestricted, unprotected songs of Orpheus, 'wild dogs' recalling the Thracian women who eventually tore him apart. Nevertheless, even when men again 'turn to savagery', love like Orpheus is still seen 'traversing the still-moist dead' and despite its lack of involvement, 'serene even to a fault', poetry still has its place, 'carrying compassion/to the rawly-difficult'. Poetry's inability, like Orpheus, to actually reverse the processes of death forms the theme of two earlier poems, one based on an adventure story, the other on Arthurian myth. 'Solomon's Mines'³⁰ is a direct echo of the Orpheus myth, archeology proving incapable of true resurrection, finding only 'blazed-out, stripped-out things' and unable, like Orpheus, to curb its curiosity, to escape 'without looking round/out of that strong land'. 'Merlin' again considers the burden of the past, the 'outnumbering dead', even figures redeemed in myth joining the piles of the anonymous dead, mastered by the 'pinnacled corn', their enmity resolved in death,

'Arthur, Elaine, Mordred; they are all gone
Among the rafted galleries of bone'³¹.

Hill's boldest adoption of myth, however, comes in 'Doctor Faustus', a poem which deals with man's attempt to make himself into a god, or indeed God; 'gods - as men - rise from shut tombs'. 'The Harpies' section presents just such a false god, concealed by his age and once again allied to the sea, 'by the torn waters'. Legend does not protect the innocent; indeed it conceals real danger in mythical form; the 'lewd uproarious wolf' which blows down the straw house of the first little pig is a horribly apt metaphor for the modern slaughter which increasingly preoccupies the poet. In a stanza which Hill also uses as a preface to the whole collection,³² blood endures as currency between the slaughterer and the slaughtered, 'a beast is slain, a beast thrives', and even the divine delude themselves in their search for omnipotence,

'A blinded god believes
That he is not blind'³³.

A more successful attempt at Faustian divinity, albeit through the auspices of a long-dead madman³⁴, is assayed in 'Little Apocalypse', a celebration of the work of the German romantic poet Hölderlin. 'Sealed' by his insanity against the 'sun's primitive renewing fury', the poet uses this light to recreate himself (although this 'brilliance' conceals inhuman 'coldness'), 'the god cast, perfected, among fire'.

The 'gods' play a major role in For the Unfallen - the 'shadow-god' of 'The Bibliographers', the 'blinded god' of 'Doctor Faustus', the 'sometimes-abandoned gods' of 'After Cumae' and the created god 'cast' in 'Little Apocalypse' - but their most complete appearance comes in the sequence 'Of Commerce and Society', 'variations on a theme' derived, possibly, from the Catholic mystic and myth-delver Simone Weil, who similarly believed that

'in a mass production and money economy there is no perceptible connection between action and the fruits of action, so that the meaning of human activity becomes increasingly absorbed into the universal exchange medium, money'³⁵.

'Hollowed' by the Great War, Europe is brought out of its 'appalled' state of shock by the demands of trade, 'the gods of coin and salt', while the sea itself is mastered by 'worked vessels', just as, in the next section, it is made 'decent again behind walls' by the Dyke builders. Europe itself is seen 'profiting from custom', its cities created by raiding the past, and as both fecund and destructive, 'nest,holocaust'. The sea is further identified with the old 'gods' in 'The Death of Shelley', extracting vengeance over the drowned poet and sucking back its riches, 'pearls and auguries', a direct contrast to the land, freezing its monuments to commerce under soot. As Section IV emphasises, these monuments are a way of forgetting the dead, even Auschwitz now 'a fable/unbelievable in fatted marble', the poet's job being to re-emphasise the arbitrary nature of these outrages, 'Jehovah's touchy methods', as unplanned as the thunder, 'however deified and defied' by its victim. In the same way, 'Ode on the loss of the 'Titanic'' treats shipwreck as sacrifice, an attempt to 'appease the terse gods' in return for the usefulness of water to commerce, occasionally 'overturned' as were the moneylenders' tables by

Christ in the Temple. In the final section, 'The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian', the links between sacrifice and salvation are again ambivalent,

'Engrossed in the cold blood of sacrifice,
The provident and self-healing gods
Destroy only to save'³⁶,

although this is a distinction lost to the more direct, less sophisticated Americans³⁷. As in 'Picture of a Nativity', the poet studies religious faith not direct but as expressed in art, here a painting of martyrdom almost comic in its detail, 'a little flutter of plain arrows'. Fine art - itself transformed into a monument, 'priceless, and harmless to the nation' - crystallises such elements of pain and thus defuses them, itself a by-product of the feudal state in which Europe still exists, 'resonant with tribute and with commerce'. As Michael Schmidt has well characterised it, the underlying theme of 'Of Commerce and Society' is 'the cruel futility, yet the universal compulsion of profit'³⁸, and this insight which human distress gives into the economic processes behind history and culture, explored more obliquely in 'To the (Supposed) Patron', is to be given even more bitter expression in Hill's second, and more unified, collection, King Log. For the Unfallen sketches out Hill's religious doubts and yet his belief in the power of myth to illuminate suffering; his later work turns these concerns more directly to the world as it is, moving from 'moral virtue' (or, at least, its tenuous hold on reality) to 'matter of power and commandment'³⁹.

King Log takes its title from Aesop's fable of the frogs⁴⁰ - they petition Zeus so send them a more active 'king' than the old log in their pond, and so he sends instead King Stork, a water snake, which devours them. the moral being that 'we are better off with an indolent and harmless ruler than with a mischief-making tyrant'⁴¹. Similarly, Hill's poetry, 'King Lög', is succeeded by 'King Stork', a prose explanation of 'Funeral Music', more explicit and scholarly than the poetry but lacking its creative magic. If power, and its subsequent abuse, is one major theme of the collection, 'power and commandment', 'moral virtue', some kind of value system to set against this brutality, is also still relevant - eight of the poems here

had already appeared as a separate pamphlet Pregchiere⁴², the Italian for 'prayers', and this religious aspect, however ambivalent, is always present. These poems at first achieved only slighting critical reaction - 'Pregchiere' indicated a 'disappointingly ingrown talent'⁴³ - the most welcoming notice coming from Stand, which had first published many of the poems, where Jeffrey Wainwright emphasised the poet's obsession with 'the sheer physical fact of death; the total erasure of a human being', approached through

'an intermittent theme of ironic and bitter contemplation of the respective dignities of ruler and ruled'⁴⁴.

Hill's poetry takes time to come to terms with, however, and King Log has since been perhaps over-analysed, notably by Jon Silkin⁴⁵ and Christopher Ricks⁴⁶, but also in a short but masterly essay by William S. Milne. as condensed as the poetry itself and exploring Hill's 'balanced tension between art and reality'⁴⁷. No one, however, has yet attempted to discuss the collection as a unified whole, and Hill's basic patterning - based, again, heavily on various approaches to myth - has thus not been properly analysed.

The opening poem of King Log, 'Ovid in the Third Reich', extends the cynicism of the Roman poet - as the epigram from his Amores claims, it is only those who admit their guilt who can be judged evil⁴⁸ - to the perpetrators of the Nazi holocaust. This ritual slaughter is itself a continuing of myth, 'the ancient troughs of blood', and the horrifyingly self-satisfied speaker calmly forgives his victims their death agonies, which 'harmonize strangely with the divine/Love' he regards himself as celebrating. 'Annunciations' continues this 'imperious theme' with love punned on as either difficult contact or 'militant conformity'⁴⁹, charity or witch-hunt,

'..... 'O Love,
You know what pains succeed; be vigilant; strive
To recognize the damned among your friends'⁵⁰.

'Annunciations' opens with the incursion of the 'Word' - both the 'Logos' of the New Testament and the impulse to poetry - into the world of the senses, sacrifice and culture weakening and distancing it, 'the reward/more touchable, overt, clean to the touch'. Similarly, Love, another abstract moral concept,

is lessened through over-exposure, 'the mere diurnal grind', and prodigality, 'forever being pledged to be redeemed'. Both 'annunciations', like that foretelling the birth of Christ made by Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, are difficult and doomed to corruption, which 'Our God scatters', both destroying and disseminating. The 'shod Word' returns in 'Locust Songs', centred around the bloodiest battle of the American Civil War, and expressed in terms of Christian myth, as here befits the Calvinist creed of early settlers, arriving 'so hard/on the heels of the damned red-man'. The white man is also damned, however, his dreams of settling in Paradise 'stung by the innocent venoms of the earth' - possessiveness the snake in this new Eden just as 'sensual pride' is the forbidden fruit, 'teeming apples' for a people who, like the 'Gadarene Squealers', will madly rush to their death. The fall from this Eden comes (significantly) at a battle fought near a church, in which 'twenty-three thousand' died in a 'wilderness of carnage'⁵⁰. The search for religious freedom, the 'shod Word', results only in a 'slow/bloody unearthing of the God-in-us', a God of vengeance ; again 'scattering corruption', and, as in the two previous poems, the poet can offer no comfort or meaning, 'but with what blood, and to what end, Shiloh?'

The next two poems convey this central incomprehension back to the Nazi holocaust with which King Log began. 'I Had Hope When Violence Was Ceast' is set directly in an extermination camp, 'our flesh oozing towards its last outrage', but in a perverse glimpse of hope it is seen that such terrorism cannot destroy one's real humanity precisely because it cannot reach it, 'that which is taken from me is not mine'. Nevertheless, 'September Song'⁵¹ stresses, with a poignancy almost unbearable in its sense of the inexorable, just what is lost, life snuffed out 'as estimated' in a process of measured terror, just 'so many routine cries'. This is not merely a matter of history - the poet, born in the same year as this young victim, has also made an elegy for himself, just as the 'smoke of harmless fires' burning the residues of autumn recalls the fires of the death-camps. Such knowledge, once gained, cannot easily be forgotten or counteracted - 'This is plenty. This is more than

enough'. The following two poems reinforce this sense of suffering - leading up to 'Funeral Music', Hill's central and most impressive rendering of this theme - by portraying, in turn, victim and persecutor. 'An Order of Service' presents a man who, like the poet, faces up to the void, 'surveyer of his own ice-world' (recalling the cold also of the death camp, 'dawnlight freezes against the east-wire') and yet retains his judgement, 'meticulous at the chosen extreme'. Even if this sacrifice is 'unappealing' and 'hopelessly vigilant' to the impartial observer, this makes it all the more brave, an unflinching yet unsighted renunciation. Conversely, the portrait in 'The Humanist' is superficially attractive, an 'achieved guest' sure of himself and his gifts, chewing his 'word-perfect' aphorisms like 'a delicate white meat'. Yet this is all show, 'Virtue is virtù, and such affected world-weariness merely a mask for censorship and intimidation,

'The commonplace hands once
Thick with Plato's blood'⁵².

The humanist, civilized man with or without benefit of God, is exposed as being as coldly distant as the speaker in 'Ovid in the Third Reich', as voracious a devourer of culture as those in 'Annunciations', also sitting 'at meat', flavouring 'their decent mouths/with gobbets of the sweetest sacrifice'. It is Plato, however, creator of the ideal Republic and a philosophy of abstractions - rather than this cultural consumer who symbolically bleeds him - whose thought underlies the next poem, 'Funeral Music' (musical form is an important force in King Log - 'Locust Songs', 'September Song', 'Fantasia on 'Horbury'', 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurrez' with its 'Coplas' - although this really marks a continuation of the elegiac tone of the previous collection, here aiming at an 'ornate and heartless music punctuated by mutterings, blasphemies and cries for help'⁵³).

'Funeral Music' opens with a direct evocation of Plato's parable of the cave, our everyday reality seen merely as a reflection of the world of ideal forms, echoed throughout by the recurring image of mirrors and light,

'Processionals in the exemplary cave,
Benediction of shadows'⁵⁴.

The setting for these glimpses of the eternal is, as in 'Locust Songs', civil war, but centred on a battle almost exactly 400 years earlier, the Battle of Towton, in which Edward IV and the Yorkists defeated the Lancastrians under Henry VI, thus setting Edward on the throne. 'King Stork' emphasises the savagery of the Wars of the Roses, made all the more implacable by the deep Christian faith of both sides. Like the protagonist of the previous poem, the Earl of Worcester is both 'patron of humanist scholars' and known as the 'Butcher of England', and this ambivalence, mingled with religious fanaticism, underlies all ~~eight~~ unrhymed sonnets, though the poet specifically avoids 'any overt narrative or dramatic structure'. Suffering is suffused with, though not lessened by, Christian significance - Worcester beheaded in three strokes 'In honorem Trinitas', each blow 'pentecostal' as the fire in 'The Bidden Guest', the mortal becoming immortal, 'psalteries whine through the empyrean'. This religious fire again recalls Plato's cave, 'ghosting upon stone' the 'vacuous ceremony' this slaughter is when divested of its political rationale. This 'tribute of pain' is a wilful sacrifice to the 'ritual king' - Caritas, the economic forces behind 'Or Commerce and Society' - the 'strange-postured' dead of Towton, ironically slaughtered on Palm Sunday, the celebration of Christ's humble entry into Jerusalem, shortly before his own self-sacrifice. More hopefully, the poet reconciles the sounds of death, 'fastidious trumpets', the 'flurrying' wind, with 'silent music' and the reflection of future reconciliation,

'..... imagine the future
 Flashed back at us, like steel against sun,
 Ultimate recompense',⁵⁵.

This leads directly to the 'curved metal' of section 3, like a comet revealing men 'livid and featureless', a wilful evocation of 'doomsday', a horrifying approach to Christianity through the extremes of sex and death,

'Among carnage the most delicate souls
 Tup in their marriage-blood, gasping 'Jesus',⁵⁶.

Hill evokes another pagan philosopher, the Arabian mystic Averroes, who believed that the individual soul is perishable, true immortality being vested

in the world soul to which all individual consciousnesses return, life a 'myth of captivity'. Hill's grounding in Christian culture, however much he now doubts, makes such easy solutions untenable, for belief in the indestructibility of the soul is still possible, 'though I would scorn the mere instinct of faith'. On the pivotal phrase 'as with torches', on which the sequence divides into its two equal halves, 'Funeral Music' moves towards some kind of moral framework in which to set this meaningless suffering.

Section 5 opens with atonement and 'Wild Christmas', a return to the scene of 'Picture of a Nativity', the wise man's gift of spikenard a symbol of 'the real essence of remorse'. This thirty year slaughter may be a mere interlude, the 'soul's winter sleep', in a longer period of humanity. These hopes are illusory, however, for prayers are answered not by the seraphs - bearers of pentecostal fire in section I - but ourselves, the 'damned' again, racked in 'lingering shows of pain', 'tenderness' not for others but ourselves. Section 6 takes up two images from section 3, England crouched 'beastwise' beneath slaughter, and the blindness of both death and sexual love. The poet has evoked, through the innocence of his son's imagination, a world of moral order, a 'composed mystery' ordered by a yet more powerful Father, God. This vision should neither be sentimentalised through nostalgia or indulged in to the exclusion of reality; once gone, 'the world's real cries' should be accepted in the place of the fantasies of childhood, 'I believe in my/ abandonment, since it is what I have'. Like the gorgon, the poet, meticulous as the hero of 'An Order of Service', must stare even if such honesty kills through reflection, 'averted conscience turned against itself'. In poetry of great weight and restrained power, the world of reality is reached through mutual reflection, even though such empathy is mutually destructive,

'As the armies met, each mirrored the other;
Neither was outshone. So they flashed and vanished
And all that survived them was the stark ground
Of this pain'⁵⁷,

the 'funeral music' of battle reduced to a 'remote cry' and images of desolation. The sequence ends on a note of quiet uncertainty, a declaration of unwilling

surrender both by the victims of Townton and, by implication, those under the dominance of any kind of tyranny, 'not as we desire/life but as they would have us live'. These victims are united, though not appeased, by their suffering, 'all echoes are the same/in such eternity', and thus bear witness, as do the 'damned' in 'Ovid in the Third Reich' through their suffering, to 'each distant sphere of harmony' (a direct echo of the former who 'in their sphere/harmonize strangely with the divine/love'). This is all very well, but it gives no meaning to present holocaust, such modern interpretation and parallels playing around the surface of the sequence - the 'ritual king', 'marriage blood', the prayer 'pro nobis', the poet's son who could outstare the 'wearisome dragon of sleep, and the remote cry which perhaps 'heralded my name'. Hill pointedly fails to justify or explain, instead ending the sequence with a question, one which, for all its hopeful tenderness and affection, pre-supposes a continuation of the poem's underlying terror at the processes of history and sacrifice,

'..... Then tell me, love,
How that should comfort us - or anyone
Dragged half-unnerved out of this wordly place,
Crying to the end, 'I have not finished'⁵⁸.

In some ways, 'Funeral Music' can be seen as a preparation for Mercian Hymns; like the later work it erects its own kind of legend from scanty and scattered historical material, using precise imagination and a sensitive feeling for place and the particularity of the past to create a new world. Notwithstanding 'King Stork' - or, indeed, the notes to Mercian Hymns - both poems create a highly personal and patently unhistorical narrative which both stands on its own and explores the poet's - and reader's - sense of self, compassion and violence particularised in a newly made legend. 'Funeral Music' ultimately derives its undoubted power not from a close survey of the 15th century (this historical material is relegated to 'King Stork') but the use of such attested brutality and religious hypocrisy to examine both more recent holocaust (nothing is new) and the poet's unexpiated sense of guilt, evoked more directly in 'September Song'. The heart of 'Funeral

'Music' comes in section 7, at the very climax of battle and, in parallel terms, of the poet's coming to awareness of his own 'abandonment'. The mirror imagery that has been seen to underlie the sequence at last becomes comprehensible, it reflects, as does the 'funeral music' of battle and execution, the poet's own interior division between unacceptable arrogance and its horrified recognition, 'a hawk and a hawk shadow', self-disgust -

'Prowess, vanity, mutual regard,
It seemed I stared at them, them at me.
That was the gorgon's true and mortal gaze:
Averted conscience turned against itself'⁵⁹.

Just as 'Funeral Music' was dedicated to two murdered poets, Suffolk and Rivers, the remaining poems in King Log deal primarily with the links between art, myth and suffering, from the directness of 'Four Poems Regarding the Endurance of Poets' - adapting humility in the face of such bravery - to the more complex moral tensions of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz, in which suffering derives from love, not tyranny. In view of the cautious self-revelation of 'Funeral Music', these poems derive added resonance and power in being not mere eulogies but a viewing of bravery and commitment which the poet admires but cannot himself manage. Even 'Four Poems' reveals this studied ambivalence, - seen, as usual for Hill, in his multiple puns - 'regarding' (verb/adverb, watching/about), 'endurance' (individual/general, physical imperviousness/moral stature/survival). Dealing in turn with victims of four political creeds united only by their tyranny and suspicion of art, or indeed any kind of independent truth - the Counter-Reformation, Franco's fascist Spain, the Nazis and Stalin's form of Marxism - the sequence again refuses to purvey an optimism or sense of justice the poet does not believe. 'Men are a Mockery of Angels' develops the torture imagery of section 5 of 'Funeral Music', 'tenderness of the damned for their own flesh', to a yet more extreme compulsion - even when 'glutted Torment sleeps', the poet is 'commanded to rise' (both by his gaolers and God, who shares his cries) when he wishes to 'compose his voice' - create poetry or set his emotions in order. Campanella is designated as 'priest and poet', and this primacy of

faith over art is stressed - the 'shadow' which sometimes shares his cell is surely God, just as his suffering mirrors Christ's, in a trope borrowed from the Elizabethan sonnet, 'derisive light, bread, filth' representing 'justice, wounds, love' (the necessity to eat, 'stained with its prompt food', is seen as an affliction). Like Bruce and the spider which (legend has it) inspired him, but on a more self-abasing scale, the poet takes comfort and humility from the slug which climbs 'the glinting pit-side/of its own slime'. ~~The~~ 'A Prayer to the Sun', develops this sense of illumination from outrage - darkness brings eventual light 'above all things' (although the same syntax could mean that the sun creates darkness, or that this darkness is total, 'above' everything) although it is at noon, its height of power, that 'vultures salute their meat'. In the third of these declining stanzas (like the path of the sun across the sky?) the sun's, and God's, ambivalence is accepted, a 'ravager' who can also bless. 'Domaine Public' further praises the self-abasement of the early Christians to help 'cultivate the corrupting flesh', a willed silence, 'suppression of much improper speech' (obscene or inappropriate), also attempted by Campanella. Death and life are interfused, an open mouth the tomb, the days of the week as 'seven pits', the orderlies of the death camp playing at, and prefiguring, God, 'again we/resurrect and the judges come'. 'Tristia' is a more personal poem, to a 'difficult friend' but one, nevertheless, whom Hill never met, 'again I am too late'; nevertheless Mandelshtam, driven mad by his persecution, reveals the links between tragedy, the sun and God, all cruel tyrants who feed on human grief and desolation, 'hard summer sky/feasting on this, reaching its own end'.

The following four poems deal more generally with the common ground held between poetry and suffering. 'The Imaginative Life' locates this in myth, 'the irregular visions of a god', the tortured flesh of 'Men are a mockery of Angels' transformed through terror 'to purging and delight'. Figures from both classical and Christian myth - the Furies earlier placated by 'decent' ceremony in 'A Pastoral' and the 'true seraphs' who brought Pentecostal fire in 'Funeral Music' - celebrate both lust and death, or rather their

conjunction, 'gargantuan mercies whetted by a scent/of mortal sweat'. 'The Assisi Fragments' deals more directly with Christian legend, Saint Francis's love for the 'mild inflammable beasts' an Eden before the Fall,

'And there the serpent
Innocently shone its head'⁶⁰,

which is destroyed by the consciousness of death (in the previous poem it was transformed by it), subject to hawk - the poet's own sense of sin in 'Funeral Music' - raven, wolf and fire, both of Pentecost and destruction. These emblematic beasts tie in with other such creatures of blood-lust, those 'forever bent upon the kill' in 'Genesis', the buzzards of 'Locust Songs' and their fellow scavengers the vultures in 'A Prayer to the Sun', and, later, the owl and foxes of 'Three Baroque Meditations', all far removed from the tamed symbolic lion of G. Wilson Knight's critical mythology.⁶¹ 'History as Poetry' returns again to Pentecost, poetry itself as a new birth out of the 'tongues' not of fire but the (paradoxically) 'speechless dead', like Lazarus or domestic flowers a carefully prepared resurrection from the earth. Poetry is both legendary - 'fortunate auguries' - and superfluous - 'tarred golden dung' - but its one salient merit is to link past and present, history and the modern world, 'the old laurels wagging with the new'. It is this timeless aspect of poetry which is celebrated in 'Soliloquies', explained, again, in terms of myth, the 'ritual power' of age and loss (these two poems describe, like the two parts of 'The Assisi Fragments', Eden and the Fall, 'what I lost'). 'The Stone Man' looks back to childhood as a symbolic 'half-recognized kingdom of the dead' - the tone of these reminiscences prefigure that of Mercian Hymns - a revelation that unites flesh and sun, the two tokens of suffering. Conversely, 'Old Poet with Distant Admirers' looks forward to the 'ritual power' of old age, death viewed from the other direction, and, as in 'History and Poetry', preserves 'fragments, in the observing mind' against the coming silence of oblivion, poetry outdistancing biography 'as in the great death-songs/of Propertius (although he died young)'.

There follow two more particularised essays in literary biography, though

it is still the connection between art and suffering which forms their most obsessive theme. 'Cowan Bridge' contrasts fact and fiction, the school which the Bronte children attended with 'Lowood', the parallel school invented by Charlotte in Jane Eyre, but it is Emily who is most in mind. This 'temperate place' nurtured the 'lost storm' of Wuthering Heights, immersion in the natural world (the 'alders' of 'In Memory of Jane Fraser', the 'elder-bush' of 'The Stone Man', both suggesting death and decay - like beasts, plants are emblems to Hill) leading to the 'vulnerable pieties' of a new myth, tempered by the restraint of place, 'the modesty of her rage'. 'Outworn piety' also moulds the subject of 'Fantasia on 'Horbury'', transforming the menace, again, of northern landscape into art, 'plush tunes' which defend the artist against his 'unspeakable desolation', mirrored by his surroundings,

'This place not of his choosing, this menace
From concave stormlight, a freak suggestion...
These heads of nettles lopped into the dust...' ⁶⁴.

'Three Baroque Meditations' deepens this contrast between the consolation of art - 'the lamp's fierce head/of well trimmed light' - and the metaphorical darkness of the natural world outside - 'foxes and rain-sleaked stone and the dead'. Section I makes the central concern of King Log at last explicit,

'Do words make up the majesty
Of man, and his justice
Between the stones and the void?' ⁶⁵,

can art measure up against suffering and death? The poet speaks directly about his art in the opening two sections, the 'fire' of poetry a kind of priesthood of death, 'hard praise' to the goddess Minerva, which celebrates the constant violence of nature, 'the lithe/paradigm Sleep-and-Kill'. This justifies the obsession with slaughter and sacrifice of poems like 'Funeral Music', 'the poem/moves grudgingly to its extreme form'. Nevertheless, the poet also meditates on his sense of restraint, better to realize the 'impalpable bitterness' of his subject matter, an obsessive self-regard,

'..... For I am circumspect,
Lifting the spicy lid of my tact
To sniff at the myrrh. It is perfect' ⁶⁶

It is only by such fragmented methods that the poet can properly evoke the 'Furies' of 'The Imaginative Life', who 'bask their claws' with the 'flesh of abnegation' (surely drawing on the beasts with 'claws flesh-battered' of 'Picture of a Nativity'). Section 3, 'The Dead Bride', changes perspective from the imagined poet to his imagined lover, herself allied with the beasts who plague him with their reality - she 'clawed to becalm him', the 'vixen-skill' and 'nightly prowls' of her tongue recalling the foxes outside his lighted window in the previous section. The poet's 'sacramental mouth' - both in love and poetry - struggles to heal this lifeless woman/Muse (white, a 'dead' bride), and language takes on both sexuality, speaking in 'nuances and imperatives' and the mythic power of the Mass, 'that justified my flesh' with 'far-fetched blood'. Sacrament becomes sacrilege, just as the woman who once 'writhed to conceive of him' comes to hate this restraint, 'disciplines of languages', but the poet himself is oblivious of such contempt, 'he weeps/solemnizing his loss'. What had at first seemed a direct statement of Hill's own credo as an artist becomes yet another persona. Nevertheless, this irony reflects back not just on Hill but on Sebastian Arrurruz, the supposed writer of the final sequence, in which loss is again solemnized, turned into art,

'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' is the final, but purest, example in King Log of Hill as a maker of his own legends, for here he does not, as in 'Funeral Music', embroider history, but invents his own hero, an imaginary though carefully imagined figure set carefully in place (Mercian Hymns puts both together; King Offa is developed from historical fact and yet created as a figment of Hill's imagination), a mask through which the poet can speak with a directness and purity of emotion not dared elsewhere in his first two collections. In a fine review, Derwent May described these poems as being about 'lost love, and the slow making of peace with that loss';

'The best mime the process with great delicacy and exactness, most of the forward movement of the poem seeming to register the sad labouring of the will, with relapses and intenser pangs caught in a sudden faltering, or in a phrase opening out sudden perspectives in which a more unmanageable truth is seen'⁶⁷.

Conversely, Jeffrey Wainwright sees the sequence as a 'dying fall' into cliché, 'the possibility of no longer, through the contraction of valid speech, being able to say anything meaningful'⁶⁸.

Typically for Hill, both elements are present in poems which so uneasily combine emotion and artifice, and it is this ambivalent beauty that makes the sequence so fascinating, a fit conclusion to the dualities of the whole collection; King Log and King Stork, art and the beasts, verse and prose (only 'Ovid in the Third Reich' and 'Locust Songs' can be said to have full rhyme schemes, but much of the collection eschews free verse for unrhymed but rhythmically intact stanzas of three, four or fourteen lines; terza rima, quatrains and sonnets in disguise), suffering and its expression in poetry. Sebastian Arrurruz, the 'apocryphal Spanish poet'⁶⁹, puns on the martyred saint (described as a symbol of decadent Europe in section 5 of 'Of Commerce and Society') as, literally, 'arrowroot' - both target for the 'little flutter of plain arrows' to make route for, and 'flesh-root' (as described in part V of 'Metamorphoses') from which the arrow of poetry can be nurtured, art and suffering again seen as concomitant. Similarly, these quietly desperate lovesongs delicately combine and crystallise the major themes of King Log and, indeed, For the Unfallen, freezing them in a careful fiction, from which Hill can pass on to wider, less personal, matters in Mercian Hymns, the legend of a despairing poet giving way to the legend of a whole race.

The first of Arrurruz's songs celebrates ten years of absence from the loved one, emotion calmed by the 'merciful' routine of time, the poet examining his grief as dispassionately as a scholar (or literary critic!),

'I piece fragments together, past conjecture
Establishing true sequences of pain'⁷⁰,

and thus finding comfort in, through art, the restoration of these relics of love, 'the long-lost words of choice and valediction'. These songs thus subvert time (Arrurruz is supposedly long dead)⁷¹ which both deadens loss and yet makes irredeemable the past. 'Coplas' deals with this sense of loss more directly, rejecting sophistry for simple emotion, 'I can lose what I

want. I want you', a sense of loss which the remaining songs evoke 'with slightly varying cadence'. Arrurruz miraculously predates Hill's subtle use of ambiguity (if he had actually existed, he could be adjudged an influence on the later poet!), and this further teases out his grief, just as he realises that these poems will merely add an 'unfamiliar' ('previously unknown' or 'extra') passion between his rival and his lover. This love is recalled in a 'contained' silence, which draws on earlier uses of silence to suggest the transcendental in King Log- reconciliation in section 2 of 'Funeral Music', meditation of suffering in 'Men are a Mockery of Angels, artistic creation in 'Cowan Bridge', but disregard in 'A Prayer to the Sun', 'Hell is silent'. Arrurruz can now only fully recall his love through dream and myth, through 'bargaining with sleep's/miscellaneous gods', an 'alien landscape', like that in 'The Stone Man', lit by the 'distant flashes' of the immortal. The power of myth to both transcend and deaden pain is again stressed in the 'workable fancy' - as opposed to the 'abrasive gem' earlier dismissed - of song 4, although this jewel imagery continues with sorrow transformed to a 'semi-precious' stone, a piece of 'fortuitous amber'. Restless life is 'metamorphosed' into static art, but this is a double-edged process ('deprivation' remains) just as Hill's earlier poem 'Metamorphoses' transformed suffering into death, while Ovid himself provides the morality of the 'Third Reich', 'innocence is no earthly weapon'. Song 5 makes storm a metaphor for artistic effort - 'the 'lost storm' of 'Cowan Bridge', the freak 'stormlight' of 'Fantasia on 'Horbury' - 'downpour' of rain its release, just as the poet feeds his 'hunger' with other men's poetry. 'Postures' presents another metamorphosis, through imagination and 'peaceful hermaphrodite dreams', in which 'excess of memory' can purge itself, and this increasing stylization is seen in the remaining poems in the 'Songbook', art further transforming life.

'From the Latin', dated the year of Arrurruz's supposed death, ties together the 'contained silence' of 2 and the 'blank hunger' of 5 into a dream of what could have been, 'quietness/that could feed on our lust',

the mouth turned from poetry to the offices of love (the poet's 'sacramental mouth' in 'The Dead Bride'), 'and at night my tongue in your furrow', an image which, like the 'diurnal grind' of 'Annunciations', unites habit and sexuality, though far more delicately. Like silence, hunger is a constant theme throughout King Log, and one which is carefully developed. At first it indicates mere cultural consumption (and greed), the searchers and curers who sit together 'at meat' in 'Annunciations', the 'Humanist' sitting at the Muses' table, his every aphorism 'a delicate white meat', though 'Locust Songs' gives this greed a wider dimension, 'gluttons for wrath' and the apples of 'sensual pride'. 'Four Poems Regarding the Endurance of Poets' develops this into a shameful example of the corruption against which these poets strive, the 'prompt food' of torture, vultures who 'salute their meat', maggots 'churning spleen to milk' and the unredeemed poor who 'grovel for food in the roadside field'. As with the parallel theme of suffering, this greed is transformed by art towards the end of King Log; the 'waking-taste of manna or of blood' analysed in 'The Imaginative Life' is transmuted through 'Pentecost's ashen feast' (in 'History as Poetry') into a 'portion of the soul's feast' in 'Soliloquies', the 'blank hunger' fed by verse in the 'Songbook'. The power and sense of reconciliation of this final sequence is well prepared for. The prose poem 'A Letter from Armenia', itself set out in the shape of a tree (the final short line the trunk), turns from nature to sexuality and death, 'delicate pillage' and the 'authentic dead'. The landscape of 'your part of the world' does not work on his imagination until he transforms it through poetry, the verse companion piece 'A Song From Armenia', King Stork remade as King Log. Shade screens out the sun which revealed the presence of the divine in For the Unfallen (illuminating the saint of 'In Piam Memoriam, unearthing ancient myth in 'After Cumae') and which became 'our ravager' in 'A Prayer to the Sun'; love as the cool water of regeneration which relieves the drought of 'Fantasia on 'Horbury'', 'troughed stone' which redeems the 'ancient troughs of blood' of 'Ovid in the Third Reich', gentle motion

'Your mouth, and your hand running over me
Deft as a lizard, like a sinew of water'⁷².

'To His Wife', dated a year earlier than 'From the Latin',⁷³ reveals the adulterous base of this love, the poet's wife 'not intimate but an acquaintance' and 'idly commiserated', or so it seems, by the poet and his mistress. Indeed, Arrurruz's attitude to his wife seems to echo that contempt he complains of in his lost mistress, and thus mitigate it for the neutral reader - just as 'The Dead Bride' throws a new, damaging, perspective on the poet's carefully moulded 'tact' in 'Three Baroque Meditations'. We are back to the endlessly reflecting mirrors with which I characterised King Log at the start of this chapter, verse reflecting prose, the present reflecting the past, the 'steel against sun', 'curved metal', armies which 'each mirrored the other' and 'averted conscience turned against itself' of 'Funeral Music', the 'distant flashings' in 'The Stone Man' which illuminates the kingdom of the dead. Such duplicity leads not to love but silence - 'scarcely speaking' - and 'coolness' in section II, which concludes both the poem and the collection. The poet is reduced to merely a lyric note, art rejecting its subversive role to become a mere tone of voice, 'I...caress propriety with odd words', prose celebrating the poet's loss of faith,

'And enjoy abstinence in a vocation
Of now-almost-meaningless despair',⁷⁴.

This is both a final admission of failure and yet also a beginning of the cycle of King Log all over again, for Sebastian, like Ovid in the Third Reich, celebrates the 'love-choir', rejecting 'innocence' for a blinkered concern only for the personal, whether it be lost mistress or 'work and my children'. It is significant that Ovid's epigram, which opens the collection on a note of duplicity and unadmitted guilt, is taken from his Amores, love seen as an escape from reality, the three times referred-to blindness in section 3 of 'Funeral Music' of those who 'tup in their marriage blood'. The end of King Log mirrors its opening, an endless cycle of definition, warfare, hard won experience through suffering, and artistic expression mutating into self-defeat. It is this cycle (also discernable in For the Unfallen) which Hill again follows, yet subverts, in the fully created legend of Mercian Hymns.

Mercian Hymns⁷⁵ has been described as 'the best English book of poems since...Eliot',⁷⁶ and, like the Waste Land it uses fragments of the past, brief glimpses of (metaphorical) scenery and a mock-scholarly apparatus to create its own myth, an epic for a less leisurely age. Nevertheless, where Eliot's purpose is to contrast the richness of the past with the sordidness of the present, Hill is more subtle, stressing instead the continuity, through legend, of both the rich and the sordid in the development of the race. As Silkin has noted, this effectively prevents the reader from using myth as a mode of escape, 'the poem deliberately thwarts any attempt by the reader to keep his or her imagination safe in the past',⁷⁷ using it instead to structure this difficult meeting of past and present, 'rather than traditional narrative...Hill adopts myth as his method of cohesion',⁷⁸. Hill himself, in a rare comment on his own poetry, stresses both the work's humour and its force, even to him, as legend,

'it was an enchantment difficult to justify on rational grounds but, once it had been drawn, the details of the fantasy took on their own rationale',⁷⁹.

As with King Log, notably 'Funeral Music', and the later Lachrimae, Hill reads widely around the period he is poetically recreating⁸⁰ though such learning is worn lightly - though powerfully - in the final work, spilling over instead into his critical work of the time. The general background of the Midlands, earlier celebrated by George Eliot, and the rhythms of 19th century life (also explored in Hymn XXV) are sensitively explored in 'Redeeming the Time',⁸¹ while, as Christopher Ricks pointed out in his pertinent review⁸², Hill's essay on Cymbeline develops Offa's kind of cruel yet envied rule, tribal leader becoming monarch and founder of his race,

'A British King is seen for what he is; uxurious, irrational, violent when prodded, indulgent, of absolute status and ultimately invulnerable',⁸³.

In Mercian Hymns, this ambivalence of response, respect crossed with fear, is brought fully to bear, King Stork once more (grudgingly) celebrated, King Log once again (lovingly) mocked, as in the medieval graffiti⁸⁴ on the front cover. It is the 'unfallen', again, who merit praise.

In Mercian Hymns, legend is less immediately relevant to either present political realities or the incidents of the poet's own life than, say, Seamus Heaney's North - past and present are not neatly parcelled into two contrasting sections but compressed into one mythic continuum. Similarly, Hill does not directly collate a range of historical legend, as does Heaney, but instead raises a historical figure to a new legendary significance, although both poets have the same basic aim, to explain their society. To complement this new legend, Hill invents a new form, a kind of clipped, highly allusive prose-poem, 'curt graffito' like Offa's own name, drawing partly on the prose passages of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurrez', but with a kind of tense directness new - and welcome - to Hill's work. The original 'Mercian Hymns' were also, of course, poetry recast as prose, 'those high moments of lyrical praise which occur with the prose passages of the Latin text'⁸⁵ - Silkin suggests the underlying presence of the Te Deum⁸⁶ - but most significantly they were glosses, in a regional dialect, on Hebrew myth, itself relayed through the Latin.⁸⁷ Milne has suggested here, perhaps rather fancifully, a parallel with Hill's glossing of Mercian history, refracted through the 'translation' of modern life in the Midlands. Certainly Hill glosses the historical details of Offa's life, transmuting them into events which help establish 'the presiding genius of the Midlands'. Just as King Log expanded on its epigram of 'matter of power and commandment', so Mercian Hymns develops these concerns, glossing C.H.Sisson's thoughts⁸⁸ on 'the conduct of government', state and individual expressing each other, just as Offa acts for, and represents, his people, both past and present. None of this really explains the sheer complexity of reference and the dexterous - often wildly comic - use of legend which characterises Hill's 'brief epic' and which is so leadenly absent in most of his imitators. The work is far more allusive and self-contained than the following analysis can suggest - each new reading reveals further nuances and internal parallels, the logical inconsistency of true legend, language melted and recombined in new, magical constructions.

The first two of the thirty prose sections that comprise Mercian Hymns deal with this sense of language, centred on the naming of Offa as king, a process both powerful and mysterious - in legend, to name a man is to obtain mastery of his actions. Hymn I ostensibly sets out Offa's duties and sovereignty, a kind of ritual divinity over the processes of Nature, 'king of the perennial holly-groves', the earth, 'riven sand-stone', and time, responsible both for the 'historic rampart and ditch' of the Dyke for which he is best remembered and the 'M5', trackway and motorway. These roles are archetypal for a guardian of his race, -king, builder, guard, businessman, lawyer, priest and scholar - and they unite present and past, 'contractor to the desirable new estates', both feudal lands and modern housing collectives. Like his contemporary and friend Charlemagne, Offa creates a nation from a diverse jumble of warring states, though with requisite cruelty, a 'martyrologist' who causes, as well as records, such outrages. Offa's comic, though despotic, arrogance is further heightened by his magisterial command, 'I liked that....sing it again', Hill seen disconcertingly as a kind of modern court poet who delivers a paeon to his dismissive master. Hill, of course, obeys, and Hymn II extends this naming of Offa, parodying the curt list of a dictionary definition. Offa is a 'common name',⁸⁹ and therefore representative, but it also suggests popularity, 'best-selling brand', and yet something suspect - in a pun on 'offer' - a 'specious gift'. It is Offa's ambivalence which his name most clearly defines, both the 'starting cry of a race' - either its birth pangs or its first words - as, in a different sense, this poem is - and a 'name to conjure with', one both to respect and to perform magic with, just as Mercian Hymns is a kind of conjuring trick performed by Hill to mystify and, through such mystifications, entertain his audience.

The next three poems are entitled 'The Crowning of Offa' in the key to titles at the back (itself a further key, naming again suggesting mastery) but they approach this not through direct ceremony but the kinds of initiation which the ritual king has to undergo to become a man 'acting on behalf of many'!

Hymn III describes the coronation, therefore, indirectly through the eyes of one of Offa's many subjects, the poet himself as excited schoolboy (like North, the most vivid memories are those drawn from childhood, and it is these which can most readily be drawn, through their sense of wonder, into myth), perhaps drawing on the coronation of George VI. Certainly the identification of the poet with, or as surrogate for, Offa is not accidental, and runs throughout the whole sequence. The sheer absurdity of the occasion - 'village-lintels curled with paper flags' - both stresses the comic discontinuity between state ceremony and village response and yet presents the important incursion legend can make into normality, the ritual 'bonfire of beer-crates and holly-boughs' - holly being closely associated with pre-Christian ritual in Britain. Similarly, Offa's assumption of kingship is directly compared with the Resurrection, 'it was like Easter', and with fertility mysteries, the 'Stag's Head' pub recalling the 'horned phonograph' of the previous poem and preparing for the 'feral horns' of Cernunnos' in Hymn XV. As always, such seriousness is undercut by sly humour, the new king's 'foreign gaze' (later to assume more importance in terms of coinage) approving not treaties but 'hankies', the childrens' chorus of praise due not to respect but a day's holiday from school, and, most comically, Offa's surrogate as 'king', the village chef, his crown a 'new-risen hat', his largesse sealed with 'any mustard?'. The next two sections move from the 'we' of Offa's new subjects to the 'I' of Offa himself, considering his own - and perhaps the poet's - childhood and coming to power, whether of Mercia or the kingdom of words. Hymn IV develops the Anglo-Saxon concept of 'yird', itself glossed by Hill in a particularly absurd footnote⁹⁰, Offa himself seen in terms of buried gold, invested in 'mother-earth' - the only, albeit oblique, reference to Offa's parentage. Thus implanted in the womb of England, Offa emerges to transform the 'Roman flues', remnants of the previous civilization of Britain, and, through a similar rebirth, turn them into a kingdom, 'the long-unlooked-for mansions of our tribe'. Hymn V completes this birth from racial memories, 'crypt of roots and endings',

Offa emerging from the darkness of death, after long incarceration in the processes of myth, to reinvigorate his nation. Like the badgers and mole of the previous poem, Offa is made new as a subterranean creature and then 'worms' his way upward 'for ages' (literally, considering the vast historical scope of the poem) to redeem his 'wergild', the 'true governance of England'. This is expressed as a combination of the arts of war and peace, learnt from his immersion in Nature, 'barbaric ivy' prefiguring the 'gaunt warrior-gospel', 'scrollwork of fern' suggesting the 'engraved stone' which expresses it. This might all be nothing more than a young boy's imaginary game, of course, 'child's-play'. Certainly, whether 'exile or pilgrim', Offa returns to 'rich and desolate childhood', his ambivalence stressed from the start, in which he is so obviously an outsider, 'sick on outings', and yet a future monarch precisely because of this apartness, again a prototype of the poet,

'I who was taken to be a king of some kind, a prodigy, a
maimed one'⁹¹.

This sacrificial aspect of Offa's kingship is extended in Section VI, 'The Childhood of Offa'. Mercia is still in 'thrall' to scavengers, 'badger and raven', and Offa, like Christ, exiles himself in this wilderness, while retaining the treasure of Hymn 4, still 'dug and hoarded', a treasure now seen to be of fertility, the 'riven sandstone' of the opening poem now yielding honeycombs and orchards. Offa remains aloof from his fellows, a distance deliberately maintained along with 'a strangeness' and 'unattainable toys'. Where his contemporaries celebrate merely their dirt and disease, snot and impetigo, Offa draws closer to nature, following landscape 'back to its source', compensating for his lack of brothers, real or metaphorical, with toys of resin, apple-branches, mistletoe, elements of primitive faith. Offa's treatment of his one friend Ceolred⁹², as described in Hymn VII, 'The Kingdom of Offa', further stresses the future king's cruelty and aloofness, his gradual mastery over the other children mirroring his growing fitness to rule his nation. This first emerges in his casual slaughter of the frogs -
(surely an identification with King Stork here would be too pat, but it does

place Offa as the fount of the various forms of tyranny which form the principal subject of Hill's previous collection), part of the sinister abundance of Nature, with 'eel-swarms' and stagnant marlpools, on the border between water and land, industry and nature, 'gasholders, russet among fields',⁹³ Nevertheless, Offa's cruelty is worked at, 'with branches and half-bricks, he battered a ditchful', and deliberately casual, 'then sidled away'. Ceolred's crime is to lose Offa's model biplane, a reference point for war and the heroic fantasies of childhood heroes (perhaps Biggles!), but turned, through loss, into a relic, along with 'rat-droppings and coins'. Offa's response to this accident is to flay Ceolred - a typically brutal and Mercian punishment - having 'lured' him like an animal to his native haunts in earth and history, the 'old quarries'. Most notable are both Ceolred's continuing loyalty, he 'was his friend and remained so', and Offa's attaining of peace and reflection from his cruelty, leaving the pond of dead frogs in 'stillness and silence'. He abandons Ceolred to journey 'calm and alone' in his 'private derelict sandlorry named Albion' - the spirit of old England again used to master the earth, this time comically through channelling sand, and a deliberately ludicrous metaphor for Offa's new kingdom.

The next two hymns continue this progress to kingship. Section VIII, 'Offa's Leechdom', deals with the political purges which characterised Offa's reign, a refinement of the cruelty seen in the previous hymn, and of Offa's magisterial tone already seen in section I; 'I am the King of Mercia, and I know'. Offa's corresponding paranoia is comically transposed to the present, 'phone-calls at midnight, venomous letters', but its vindictiveness is too close to present autocratic regimes to be humorous - opponents are 'mad', 'predators' (like the badger and raven of section VI who previously ruled Mercia?) and 'maimed souls' cured by a 'novel heresy'. By naming these enemies - just as Offa himself was named in the opening hymns - Offa can bleed the kingdom of their supposed treachery, a death sentence proclaimed with chilling certitude and ceremony, 'I dedicate my awakening to this matter'. Offa's full assumption of kingship is celebrated in hymn IX, 'Offa's Book of

the Dead', commemorating what I take to be the death of Beornred, the previous king of Mercia, deposed by Offa (it could equally well be Offa's mother or wife, but this would not explain the poem's underlying sense of irony). Perhaps mirroring this uncertainty, the tone of the poem is particularly ambiguous, drawing on the poet's own childhood memories of stuffy funerals and their air of collective embarrassment, undercut by a genuine sense of loss. Offa again narrates the poem, addressing his predecessor with affection - 'my dear' - for leaving state affairs 'nicely settled'. Language itself is an instrument of state, cloaking reality - the dead man is 'dismissed' by the curate just as the mourners 'dismissed' themselves, his demise echoed by the 'spoil-heaps of cypresses dead in their plastic maces', the tombs on which these rest similarly ineffectual and forgotten, an 'eldorado of washstand-marble'. Religion itself is seen similarly as a meaningless ritual, redolent of 'censers and polish', the 'strange' curate's recital of the wrong service making no real difference, indeed part of some mysterious game, a chess 'gambit' the puzzled congregation cannot answer. Even here, however, ritual shades off into genuine legend - the dead king is buried, like Christ, 'without the walls', the return of the 'three mute great-aunts', borne away by limousine, resembles the three Furies deserting their victim, while Offa himself becomes a bard, unburdening 'the saga of your burial' - prefiguring Offa's own funeral in XXVII.

Hymn X, the first of three separated poems entitled 'Offa's Laws', sees the poet regain the narrative from Offa, who enters fully into kingship by becoming lawmaker for his people, 'commissioner of oaths' from Hymn I, creator of the 'new law' of section VIII. Again Offa's brutality is stressed, made yet more chilling by his callous magnanimity, 'he forgave the death howls of his rival', and yet also comic through his supreme arrogance, exchanging 'gifts with the Muse of History'. All this serves to teach Offa the futility of regret, expressed in a parody of New Testament wisdom, for 'what should a man make of remorse, that it might profit his soul?'. In an extraordinary twist, the poem reverts to the poet's childhood memories, tying in with the 'staggeringly-gifted' Offa's 'assorted prize pens', and contrition - 'tell everything to Mother, darling, and

God bless' - Offa's self importance reduced to a need for maternal comfort, suggesting either Offa's relation to history as that of a spoilt, wilful child or the whole sequence as the poet's schoolboy fantasy of power over the adult world. This double view continues in the final paragraph, its 'mild dreams', 'cat Smut' and attempts to learn Latin all part of childhood, yet also part of Offa's education in kingship, learning mastery over his subjects, 'attempting to master ancilla and servus'. Again, the 'little pears' recall Gethsemane and its treachery, while the opening image stresses Offa's worship of power - 'he adored the desk' - allied to the sympathetic magic of seals of office 'into which he had suhk his name', creating a unity between this power and its expression, 'signatures and retributions'. Offa's concern for his subjects is ambivalent - he 'drew upon' their grievances, suggesting this very process gives him strength - but this growing mastery becomes more evident in succeeding hymns; indeed the subject of these hymns changes, blasphemously, from God to Offa, Hill as Mercia's ritual priest.

The next three sections, all entitled 'Offa's Coins', express this sense of growing majesty, allied with cruelty, in terms of the establishment of a new form of coinage, along with the Dyke Offa's most enduring achievement, and a fruition of the investment imagery of earlier poems. Hymn XI deals, in a general way, with the importance of the purity of this coinage to the community, and the extreme punishments dealt out to forgers who attempt to subvert this order. The coiners' power lies in their ability to subvert Offa's new won sovereignty - 'they could alter the king's face' - and any mistake draws a similar 'mutilation' on the coiners themselves, a punishment which takes on a ritual meaning, 'swathed bodies in the long ditch, one eye upstaring'. Justifiably cautious, the coiners 'struck with accountable tact', accountable for the monetary value of their work, as explanatory of their caution, and as responsible for any mistakes, a typical triple pun for Hill. As with the 'Roman flues' of hymn IV, Offa builds on the previous culture to create his own, coins 'handsome as Nero's' (is it suggested that Offa is just as cruel?), and using Latin to celebrate his kingship in the inscription

'Offa Rex'. These coins derive their real value from the care with which Offa's 'sparse people' have gathered the precious metal for this currency, 'scrapers of salt-pans and byres', the hard-won fruits of Mercia, the 'gold solidus' of hymn IV and the lost coins of VII won again from the earth. The success of Offa's strong policies is succinctly stated, 'he reigned forty years', as is the new orderliness of Nature, itself seen in terms of the striking of coinage - 'seasons touched and retouched the soil'. Indeed, Offa's mastery extends to the land from which he came, 'new-made watermeadow', its previous 'intimate' the wild boar now placed in the past tense.

Hymn XII brings Mercian Hymns up to the present for the first time, its elegiac picture of autumn bonfires reminiscent of 'September Song', the poet in his garden. The poem opens with earlier workmen, prosaically engaged in caulking water-pipes, discovering a buried 'hoard' of Offa's coinage, 'epiphanies' (both in a Christian sense and in the kind of brief illumination celebrated in James Joyce's Dubliners⁹⁴) from an age of legend rather than history. Indeed, they seem a relic of the myths of old England, part of some fabulous beast, 'vertebrae of the chimera', 'the fire-dragon's faceted skin'. The workmen merely despoil this heritage - 'they brewed and pissed among splendour' - oblivious of their surroundings and, unlike Offa, leaving no relics, 'scattered to your collations, moldy, warp'. Hill is far more aware of his insignificance than the workmen, but similarly he has 'accrued' not gold and silver coins but merely the 'golden and stinking blaze' of a bonfire to which he consigns the detritus of his plants. Unlike Offa, Hill cannot master Nature, the garden 'festers for attention'. This idea of coins as relics of legend is developed in hymn XIII. A modern collector, perhaps Hill himself, examines Offa's coinage by lamplight, and celebrates Offa's image as he wished it preserved, masterful, 'coiffured and ageless' and 'cushioned on a legend' of his own (and now Hill's) creation. The inscription 'Rex Totius Anglorum Patriae', king of all the lands of England, takes on added significance, this 'underkingdom of crinoid and crayfish', province of the 'rune-stone', is also under Offa's dominance, a 'self-possession' which also

possesses the secret processes of Mercia. Like his coins, Offa emerges out of 'England's well', the native myth-kitty. Offa's dominion is now complete, and he turns to politics and foreign affairs, secure in his mastery over his subjects, (as on his coinage) his head 'ringed by its own lustre'.

Hymn XIV, like X entitled 'Offa's Laws', shows Offa attempting to extend this mastery and legal control to the world of Nature, the 'underkingdom' of the previous poem. Offa is seen as a modern businessman, threatening wrongdoers with 'ash from his noon cigar, manipulating his subjects just as he does his wax seal (in section X it received the grace of his name), and 'dismissing' men - sending them away or taking their lives - with the same magisterial selfishness he shows to his family, 'he did this when it suited him, which was not often'. This is contrasted, in the middle paragraph, with Offa's deep empathy for the 'natural minutiae', creatures who, like him, achieve mastery over the inanimate earth which bore them - the trout-fry which form the 'water's underskin', woodlice sitting 'pellet-like in the cracked bark, and the snail which 'sugared its new stone'. This peace, the 'quiet hammer-pond', extends that of hymn VII (also following slaughter), evoking a new 'tenderness' in the otherwise brutal Offa. Hymn XV continues this theme, its very title, 'Offa's Bestiary', suggesting the use of animal fable to point a human moral, but Nature here regains mastery from the presumptions of the mortal Offa. The dead branch of crabwood seems to rise against him, the 'lightly concussed' king dreaming himself into divinity as the Celtic horned god Cernunnos, ruling Mercia as an 'ancient land, full of strategy'. This land, however, proves intractable to Offa's attempts at mastery, an underworld of worms, disease - 'tetanus - excreta - 'night-soil' - and poison, 'hemlock in ambush', an evil kingdom in which even a wasp's nest resembles a 'wrapped head' and in which Cernunnos/Offa is powerless, 'pitching dayward its feral horns'. The 'compost' of the poet's garden in XII and the youthful disease in VI once more rise against Offa, their inherent evil intractable.

Suitably chastened, Offa turns back to politics, and the next three hymns deal with his attempts, having secured the power of Mercia at home, to

establish respect for his new kingdom abroad. Hymn XVI, 'Offa's Sword', describes the first fruits of this policy, a 'Frankish gift' presented to Offa by his fellow king Charlemagne - celebrated in I, where his friendship is seen as the culmination of Offa's achievements - who also helped found a nation. This sword is a peace offering⁹⁵, although itself a relic of war, 'regaled with slaughter', and yet also a mark of high culture, 'the crux a craftsman's triumph'. Charlemagne's emissaries are both 'ambassadors' and 'pilgrims', the secular and the sacred, and their 'clash of salutation' brings not invasion but harmony. Nevertheless, this very friendship is 'two-edged', like the sword itself, for France and England will later grow to be implacable enemies, but it is presently as precious as the sword metal, like Offa's coinage, 'metal effusing its own fragrance'. The poem has a further dimension; however. The meeting takes place at Christmas, time of 'other miracles, other exchanges', and the birth of Christ is described in terms of winter endurance, 'the flickering evergreen', and images of pain and retribution, as in the pun 'what is borne amongst them'. Both gifts, Charlemagne's sword and the new-born Christ, are seen as ambivalent, 'indulgences of bartered acclaim', and the poem ends with the only tangible remains of this feast of celebration, 'wine, urine and ashes'.

The next two hymns, both titled 'Offa's Journey to Rome', describe an (imaginary) journey undertaken by Offa to consult the Pope⁹⁶, further evidence of Offa's international impact. Hymn XVII describes this journey in modern terms, Offa travelling in a powerful car through the 'hushed Vosges', his car radio receiving notice of future linguistic, military or political discord, 'broken utterance from the horizon of storms'. Unfortunately, the 'haleine'⁹⁷ which he 'lavished on the high valley' is the product, not of Roland's legendary horn but Offa's all too realistic car-hooter, his charger not a war horse but a sports car. This comic incongruity is extended in the poem's middle section, a childrens' quarrel about a cycle crash (junior version of Offa's 'maroon GT') leading to subjugation of the 'timid father'⁹⁸, seen, in ritual terms, as 'disfigurement of a village king'. Offa's journey is

completed, in hymn XVIII, with his visit to the cell in Pavia where Boethius, another of the intellectual victims so fascinating to Hill, had been put to death some two hundred years before, a 'visitation of some sorrow' which both visited Boethius and is visited by Offa, a typically heartless pun. Offa, true to the brutality of his humour, imagines himself not as Boethius but as one of his persecutors, willing 'the instruments of violence to break upon meditation, preventing expression through force, 'iron buckles gagged'. This knowledge, that power outweighs intellect, brings illumination, 'souvenirs for consolation and philosophy', although this directly negates the message of Boethius's work. Like the 'wiped jaws of stone' in 'Funeral Music' to which the victims of war are sacrificed, Offa resembles 'fat Caritas', this vicarious torture - 'flesh leaked rennet' - a kind of sadistic feast, after which he 'wiped his lips and hands', replete, like Pilate washing away all responsibility. Suitably heartened, Offa continues his magisterial progress, certain now of the aim to which he grants 'furtherance', a desire to cause slaughter, and culminate the Roman myth of conquest, as in the Aeneid⁹⁹ 'to watch the Tiber foaming out much blood'.

The remaining poems in Mercian Hymns establish this new order, achieved through political might, but they take on an increasingly elegiac tone.

XIX
Section^{xix} returns to the subject of 'Offa's Laws', with government seen as a kind of cleansing by fire (a development of the bonfires of III and XII, but less planned). The hymn opens with a distant, dispassionate, view of fire and warfare, the 'florid grim' sound of 'Funeral Music' toned down to 'far cries' which 'impinge like the faint tinkling of iron', the metal of Offa's sword and the cycle crash in XVII. This sinister picture of distant slaughter intrudes, as in XII, on the poet in his garden, symbol since Voltaire and Marvell of retreat and retirement, but here ineffectual. The poet's children unconsciously imitate the looters,^{as} they 'shriek and scavenge, play havoc' in this meeting place of present and past, 'riddled with toy-shards' (the unattainable toys of VI, the lost biplane of VII?), and 'splinters of habitation', similar, in this respect, to the poem which evokes it. Just as

Offa's genocide of the frogs in VII seems a sly backwards reference to King Stork, so here the children set fire to a 'sodden log', protected only by 'soft shields of fungus', like King Log destroyed for its very harmlessness. This does, nevertheless, represent a necessary and constant battle against invading Nature, the 'ramparts of compost' of XV, just as the 'thin smoke' could have been not of wattle but 'scutch-grass', and the next three sections continue this sense of unease, Offa moving back from attack to consolidation.

Hymn XX, 'Offa's Defence of the English People', opens with a description of unregenerate Nature, 'primeval heathland (as in XI) 'splattered' with bones left by predators and dangerous to man, 'adders basked'. This is contrasted with domestic civilisation, the wood and the garden - 'steel against yew and privet' - just as suburban dwellings, euphemistically named after earlier battles - 'Maldon' or 'Pengwern' - are opposed to the 'burh' of the wild bees. Such suburbia, however absurdly named, represents - both now and in Offa's time - a victory over the changeable earth, 'brickwork and paintwork above hacked marl', a triumph for the native craftsmen who have supplied the nation's most common surname, and still continue their heritage, 'fresh dynasties of smiths'. Section XXI, 'The Kingdom of Offa', continues in the same half-facetious, half-serious tone, celebrating the new national consciousness that Offa has engendered in terms of modern coach-outings to its far flung borders, 'from Teme to Trent'. These 'cohorts' (a word suggesting that this is a whimsical way of describing Offa's war bands) of charabancs (a word from the poet's childhood) are seen as a force invading Nature, and helping destroy it, 'their windshields dripped butterflies', but the underlying atmosphere is one of excited adventure, the 'thin smoke' of XIX mutating to 'plumes of steam' with which they signal from hilltop beacons. This itself spills over into sexual conquest - 'the young women wept and surrendered' - and, beyond Mercia, into the realm of legend, 'all might fancy carillons of real Camelot vibrating through the silent water', a golden age in which 'everyone was cheerful, heedless'. This, of course, does not last, indeed it is the high point of Mercian Hymns, and the gulf between temporal

and eternal gradually becomes apparent - 'deciduous velvet peeled from evergreen albums - just as does the contrast between skilled human craft and its crude imitations in nature, 'the harp-shaped brooches, the nuggets of fool's gold', 'treasures' mislaid for the benefit of future generations. Hymn XXII, 'Offa's Second Defence of the English People', the sequel to XX, again returns to the poet's childhood, here the strange camaraderie on the Home Front of the Second World War, its bombing raids a literal echo of the previous poem where 'twilight menaced the land'. Near a 'camouflaged nissen hut', the children too play at war, but with battle strategies more reminiscent of Offa's time, their 'war band' set against Nature, the 'meadow scabbed with cow dung' (an echo of the impetigo of VI). War dominates everything, from the blackout - 'the curtains were drawn' - to the 'battle anthems' relayed through the radio (a development of the 'broken utterance' received by Offa in XVII), and the young poet spends a formative part of his childhood huddled in air-raid shelters, as did Offa in his 'mother-earth'. To help circumvent his fear, Hill learns early to translate these horrors into the safety of legend, a correlative of war which evades its mortality,

'I huddled with stories of dragon-tailed airships and warriors
who took wing immortal as phantoms'¹⁰⁰.

Hill's own legends, created when more mature, attempt to trap and investigate these fears, not simply to escape them.

The next three hymns are jointly entitled 'Opus Anglicanum', a term first used to describe Middle English embroidery, but here extended to apply also to both sculpture and native metal work¹⁰¹. Hymn XXIII, however, takes it at its literal meaning, pointing the contrast of the gross physical existence of these skilled weavers and the calm eternity of the art which they produced. This art, gathered 'in tapestries, in dreams' (as in XV and, later, XXIX), attempts Platonic perfection, as seen at the start of 'Funeral Music', 'the re-entry of transcendence into the sublunary world' and dominance over the caprices of the everyday world, 'treacherous thread' mastered in a 'stringent mystery', (Offa's characteristic brutality and paranoia transformed in art).

The second stanza is, at first reading, ironic in its contrast of the riches of art - precious metals immortalising a 'deciduous' vine (as in XXI) in 'silver veining', 'gold leaf' - with the starkness of everyday life - 'they munched cold bacon' - but this too is symbolic. The workers' journey from the darkness of 'lime-splodges and phlegm' (like the dried snot of VI) to the 'reliable light' of their evenings evokes the comforts of the world view which their art helps express, 'lamps' to light the way out of the so-called Dark Ages. Hymn XXIV moves to Mercia shortly after the Norman Conquest, open to the artistic influences which Offa's friend Charlemagne first helped establish in France. It again considers the work of an anonymous, and therefore representative, English artist, here a sculptor and stone mason (the riven sandstone of I and hacked marl of XX again yielding to man, as it did to the gestating Offa), who returns to Mercia to express his own vision, 'moody testament', in church carvings. He is 'intent' on his own creation, uniting war and nature - 'warrior and lion' - nature and legend, 'dragon-coils, tendrils of the stony vine' (like the 'coiled entrenched England of XX and the 'scrollwork' of V through which Offa emerged). Hill, studying this sculpture in the present, can still perceive its quirkiness, Adam 'scrumping through leaves' - on closer inspection a 'pale spree' of saints and Christ rescuing him from Hell, seen as if in a mummers play, arcane and stylised ritual. Hill imitates this freshness of response - Christ is 'cross' both due to the configuration of stone, worn away by time, and to foretell the crucifixion, seen as it is in 'Easter sunrays'. It is not the Passion but the Resurrection which is most stressed, however, both in these two examples of the resurgence of English art and in the artist's religious motivation, 'et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum', even though he himself is 'dust...on clawing wings, and lips'. Hymn XXV takes the action on to the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution degrading English craftwork to the degradation of mechanisation and piece work, art made not for God but money. The workers are again anonymous, but are denied any aptitude for individual skill, confined to the dangerous and unpleasant task of nail

making. This is tied, again, to the poet's personal history, 'in memory of my grandmother, whose childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the nailer's darg' (a term for a day's work which also suggests darkness and imprisonment). The main motivation for this section, however, comes from John Ruskin's horrified description of this cottage industry made at the time.¹⁰³ The work is another example of the enmity between human endeavour and the inertia of nature, the 'searing wire' that can scar, the beauty of the 'damson-bloom of dust' on the 'troughed water' which nevertheless indicates both mortality, as in the previous poem, and coming industrial pollution. Artists have lost touch with reality through their championing of such progress (it would be pertinent to ask here quite who Hill is thinking of; even the quotation is taken widely out of context¹⁰⁴), celebrating the 'quick forge' and yet not the scarring it causes. The poem is certainly powerful and deeply felt, the repetition of the opening stanza symbolising the endless and unchanging ritual of this work, lacking any of the transcendental quality of the two previous kinds of craftsmanship, and a form of cruelty unknown even to the usually vindictive Offa.

Offa's cruelty, at least carried out for a purpose, recurs in hymn XXVI, 'Offa's Bestiary', a title shared with XV, which also deals with the 'surfeit of England'. The inhabitants of Mercia are themselves described as if animals or creatures of legend, 'troll-wives'. The poem is set at Yuletide, the pagan precursor of Christmas, and the celebrants indulge themselves in mead-hall or suburban retreat, 'fortified in their front parlours' (both by self-assurance and alcohol). The men are 'murderous with drink', battling, in their imagination, with battle-axes, whales and dung, but needing real warfare, to 'purge for the surfeit of England'. Also needing Offa's discipline are their wives, adept at witchcraft - 'tooth-bewitching' - and making love - 'groaners in sweetness' - but also too prodigal, 'who have scattered peppermint and confetti, your hundreds-and-thousands' (both another kind of sweet and a further example of indulgence). Offa's rule is obviously starting to wane, and the final poems in Mercian Hymns deal with his death and yet, conversely, his immortality.

The final four poems of Mercian Hymns, jointly entitled 'The Death of Offa', set the historical king into his rightful place in legend, the ritual phrase 'Now when King Offa was alive and dead' both establishing his immortality (partly through Hill's own bardic efforts) and hinting that this death is either, like Christ's, illusory or, like Arthur's, temporary. Hymn XXVII describes the ceremonial arrangements for Offa's funeral in the same flippant way as his crowning in Hymn III, the funeral itself as botched as that of his mentor in IX and merely stressing, as in the opening poem, the historical continuum ruled over by the dying king, his subjects both 'papal legate and rural dean', the same office in past and present tenure. This violent conjugation is comic, both in its aptness - 'Merovingian car-dealers' - and its punning - a 'shuffle' of 'house-carls' as with playing cards - but it can also express a more bitter reality, 'he was defunct... they were perfunctory', and it is the ceremony, not Offa, which 'stood acclaimed'. 'Memorial vouchers' replace the 'gift-mugs' of III but both are equally tawdry - it is the 'signs' that Offa leaves which are most important, just as Offa's real testament of passing is the 'midsummer hail-storm' which symbolises his own destructiveness, as with the frogs, and the power of Nature which, alone of all his subjects, Offa could not subdue. Earth lies 'for a while' the victim and 'ghost-bride' of this violence, mythologised as 'livid Thor', the dead Offa (whose origins were in this very earth, bursting to light in V as if a seed growing into life) the fallen 'shire-tree' (his shire Mercia) lying in a pool of either blood or strawberries, a battle for survival finally lost in 'the arena of its uprooting'. However, the hail-storm is itself a freak event, 'shadowy, threshing', and occurring in mid-summer, not winter, as compared to the permanence of earth and the kind of tradition vested both in the 'shire-tree' and Offa, the ceremony not a funeral but a wedding between 'ghost-bride' earth and the masculine force of storm, a sexual awakening - 'thrashing' - which presages the birth of a new nation from the roots of the old.

Hymn XXVIII, in a kind of last will and testament, celebrates the lasting effects of Offa's reign in terms of the three central concerns of

the sequence, genealogy, craftsmanship and Nature. Offa bequeathes to the future both 'processes of generation' - his own children and the possibility of further new life - and 'deeds of settlement' - sexual and legal - a form of investment, not just, as in IV, in 'mother-earth' but in 'properties of healing-springs' which can establish a nation, 'our children and our children's children', at last a force which Offa accedes to, 'o my masters'. 'Masters' could equally be the schoolteachers of the young poet or even the Gods, of course. The second paragraph deals, as did XII, with the more tangible, less deeply integrated, remnants of Offa's dominance, the past intruding on the present as 'tracks of ancient occupation' - both literally and metaphorically - 'frail ironworks' (the nailer's industry of XXV) conquered by the 'thorn-thicket' so powerful in ancient ritual, and old 'hearthstones', the origins of a civilization tested by time and fire, 'charred lullabies'. Such memorials to the past are best achieved, however, through not archeology but the imagination working on everyday experience and making it properly mysterious, 'a solitary axe-blow that is the echo of a lost sound'. This sense of historical resonance is taken up in Nature, the 'legendary holly' (ritually burnt in III) and the 'long rain' into which the axe-blow recedes, just as its imagined 'ridged gleam' - (as with the sword of XVI) is evoked in the mystic 'silverdark' of this ancient forest, rooted as deep as the 'shire-tree' of the previous poem, as impenetrable as Offa himself.

Hymn XXIX opens with Offa's final statement to both his subjects and posterity, the sense of being ritually set apart (in V and VI) from other children seen as, instead, a closeness to his future subjects, 'not strangeness but strange likeness', and to his own ancestors, 'obstinate' and 'outclassed' (the same old arrogance) but finally acknowledged by their self proclaimed 'staggeringly-gifted child' who brought their earlier attempts at founding the Mercian nation to fruition. In the double perspective of the poem, of course, this can also be seen as the poet's own valediction to his own ancestors, the past and family roots at last bringing comfort to the tortured poet of the first two collections (obsessed with other poets also set apart, tortured more directly). In consequence, the poem again unexpectedly shifts

to Hill's own (perhaps equally mythical) childhood, a picture of suburban comfort - 'Gran lit the gas, his dice whirred in the ludo-cup' - as charming as its context is ludicrous. This, in turn, alludes to the whole structure of *Mercian Hymns*, a game of chance (like the 'shuffle of house carls') in which the poet directs play, both a childhood fantasy and a potent myth, Offa being transfigured, like Christ after the resurrection, in a kind of divine ascension from history into legend, 'so, murmurous, he withdrew from them', both poet, Offa and reader entering the 'last dream of Offa the King' (as in the sleeping vision of XV) and the last poem of the strange continuum which is *Mercian Hymns*. Hymn XXX, the final 'Death of Offa', presents this, again, as a kind of transfiguration, the king seeming to approach the present only, as the abrupt change of pace and gap in the prose line indicates, to suddenly disappear into the darkness of ancient history from which Hill originally evoked him, the sympathetic magic of *Mercian Hymns* failing just as too much imaginative strain is put upon it;

'And it seemed, while we waited, he began to walk to-
wards us he vanished',¹⁰⁵

'Us' refers to all of Offa's dependents - his ancestors, his subjects, the inhabitants of modern Mercia and the readers of the poem which celebrates him - but Offa himself 'murmurous' or, in the end, mute, needing Hill to explain his motives and demands. Beside these poems, however, Offa does leave tangible evidence of his reign on earth, coins (as in VII) 'for his lodging' - both as payment for hospitality and, in a wider sense, and as a token for the nation he has established - and 'traces of red mud', a final uniting of the blood and mother-earth motifs which have run throughout the whole poem. These twin legacies display Offa's two guiding qualities, his magnanimity, founding a nation despite, or perhaps through, his own innate cruelty, and his essential mystery, still unplumbed, and indeed deepened, by Hill's attempt at myth-making. The discontinuity between the imposing list of titles and positions of power set out in I (itself reading like an obituary) and the slightness of mementos in XXX is deliberate, and forces the searcher for Offa to look elsewhere, indeed to the legend which Hill has so carefully created.

Mercian Hymns remains an astounding achievement, a pared-down national epic which is achieved with a mastering irony fit to dispel any element of patriotic flag waving, a new kind of poetry in which all inessential details are etched away to leave only the essential elements of legend,

'like a tree with fruit and branches, perfectly alive but without leaves',¹⁰⁶.

The poem is exquisitely patterned, with a triple time scale; Offa's life from childhood to old age and death, the movement of the seasons from Spring (III) to 'Winter' (XVI) and back to Spring again (XXIV) - birth, death and rebirth - and the progress of a single day, from the 'morning' of III to the 'hoon cigar' of XV and the 'silverdark' of evening in XXVIII. Nevertheless, Hill is always aware of this careful construct as just so much illusion, Offa a name 'to conjure with', which, like a magician's worked-at spectacle, suddenly vanishes, not reality but a dream. It is this very playfulness which makes Hill's new legend so fascinating and, even more than Seamus Heaney's careful reconstructions of Irish folklore, such a brave feat of artistic imagination.

Hill's most recent collection, Tenebrae¹⁰⁷, further develops the poet's approach to myth, but in a way which I, though few other critics, find in many ways unsatisfactory, despite the limpid and almost unearthly beauty of some of the verse; indeed the concluding lines of the collection seem to acknowledge the whole book's startling lack of concreteness (the most enhancing quality of Mercian Hymns), a yielding to the heraldic and cerebral,

'and when we would accost her with real cries
silver on silver thrills itself to ice',¹⁰⁸.

Tenebrae in effect ignores the experiment of Mercian Hymns - increasingly looking like a special project not to be repeated - for a development of the themes and techniques of King Log in a more ethereal way, the prose of Mercian Hymns yielding again to the tight verse of the poet's early work. The book as a whole is imbued in myth, not created but taken from elsewhere, dedicated to the ancient land of Cythera, which 'Ulysses and Hermod/entered afraid; by ageing poets sought',¹⁰⁹ (if this latter phrase is interpreted ironically by Hill it is one of the few flashes of humour in an over-serious collection).

just as Hill elsewhere described a true spiritual response to reality as
 'the pitch of attention....that is ample praise and makes a proper
 rebuke to the gods of the world',^{II0}.

Indeed, it is only Christian myth which has any resonance in Tenebrae - the
 classical pantheon and native legends mastered in earlier collections are
 almost entirely discarded. Critical reaction has been puzzled, although
 few have been as honest as Edwin Morgan in admitting this, that the book is

'beautifully made and with many interlocking parts, some of them
 familiar in other contexts, but the function of the whole
 mechanism extremely hard to ascertain',^{III},

his very review coming a year after publication (the book seemed to trickle,
 rather than march, into the market-place). In an invaluable special issue of
Agenda^{II2}, Jeffrey Wainwright - the critic who seems most often to have the
 poet's ear - sees the whole book as based on its epigraph, a desperate search
 for Cythera, the lost land of perfect love, through sex and religious faith
 to escape its opposite, 'the acceptance of death which is indifference to
 life and pain, particularly the pain of others',^{II3}. John Peck sets the book
 more in its Christian context, setting the 'action of poetry at an intersection
 of Pentecost with resurrection',^{II4}, a method brilliantly applied to 'Lachrimae'
 by Cathrael Kazin^{II5} and, more wordily, by W.S.Milne, Hill objectifying his
 'private beliefs and unbeliefs' by aligning himself with 'a strong tradition
 of English and European religious poetry',^{II6}. John Bayley is less convinced,
 acknowledging that 'this is a poetry to admire the outside of' but seeing
 Hill's trick of viewing things as if from a great distance as a way of 'giving
 to pure aesthetics an air of the moral',^{II7}. The collection is certainly
 allusive, in a more hidden way than before, as well as owing much to the
 mythic theology of Simone Weil, as indicated earlier, but Hill's perennial
 concerns recur, expressed in a more private and quietly - but carefully -
 structured way, the Four Quartets (there are indeed four major sections) to
 the Waste Land of Mercian Hymns, more assured, more doctrinal, and yet lacking
 the sharpness and modulated irony of the earlier work, life subdued into art.
Tenebrae, however, marks a progress not into fire but darkness.

Tenebrae, indeed, opens with shadows, night and violent death, in Hill's most mysterious sequence, 'The Pentecost Castle'. Unlike the earlier 'Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', the work of a strictly imaginary Spanish poet from the turn of the century, Hill here takes ready-made Spanish songs of the early Renaissance¹¹⁸ and emphasises their latent mingling of secular and divine love, a trait pointed to by the poem's original epigraph,

'San Juan de la Cruz sang, as he danced holding in his arms an image of the infant Jesus snatched from a crib, the words of an old love song: 'Si amores',¹¹⁹

Hill uses these originals much as he used the source material of Offa's life in Mercian Hymns, as a base of unformed legend on which he can create his own mythic narrative, deriving from this obscure background

'both a dramatic mode and an impersonality for his experience... a music more fluid than the ballad strains to which British poets, from Wordsworth through Hardy and Yeats, have gone for renewal',¹²⁰

Pentecost is a key term in Hill's work - its failure to materialize in 'The Bidden Guest', the ritual death blow in 'Funeral Music', the 'ashen feast' in 'History as Poetry' - and here again the 'cold paradox of fire' is central to the poet's doubts. The surface narrative here seems to be that of a man betrayed and murdered by his lover - the bitter paradoxes of love are alluded to in the twin epigraph - symbolically interpreted, again paradoxically, as the poet's betrayal by, not of, Christ. The first three sections describe this murder, watched from the castle walls, with its ritual connotations - 'under the briar rose', 'caught in the thorn grove' - perhaps developing Offa's death and legacy in the 'thorn-thicket' as well as the crucified Christ, 'the lord I sought to serve', 'his blood on his brow'. Section 4 draws directly on 'The Bidden Guest', its 'forlorn altars' again denying the modern efficacy of the Mass, its flames of attempted resurrection leaving merely 'tears of wax', its celebrants love-lorn ghosts like the murdered lord of 5, passing 'without a sound'. Violent death recurs in section 6, the dying heron - as emblematic¹²¹ as the 'Jesse tree' of 4 or the 'goldfinch and hawk' of 5 and similarly

undefined - seeking immortality and a state of grace, unattained in the Mass, where 'love/rests and is saved'. The next three sections meditate on 'Christ the deceiver',^{I22}, crucified in the 'far field' and displaying his 'five wounds' but less the conventional object of devotion than a betrayer, 'dealing' his suffering like the magic tricks of Offa and betraying his disciple, 'Medina's pride', into death, 'I die to sleep in love'. Section IO considers the more positive aspect of the crucified Jesus, his body transformed into the bread of the Mass, 'never-depleted heart's food', but this still cannot redeem sexual love, 'love-runes we cannot speak', genuine response paralysed into ritual, 'our passion its display'. The lost lover is addressed directly in the next two lyrics (directly recalling both the tone and grief of Sebastian Arrurruz), section II creating this lover, significantly, from the torturer (real and metaphorical) of the original^{I23} and section I2 seeing her married to another, 'each of us dispossessed', this darkness of night and dream leading to the vision of the Pentecost Castle itself in section I3, the heart of the whole sequence. This symbol of the transcendental is expressed in paradox - 'splendidly-shining darkness' (like the 'silverdark' of Mercian Hymns?), drawing pride from meekness and 'majesty' from distress - but it gathers all human longing, turning the briefness of love, divine or secular, into 'unending song', a fragile vision of eternity deriving from human pain,

'and lover keep with lover
a moment and for ever',^{I24}.

Such illumination lasts only a similarly brief 'moment', and section I4 returns to consideration of the betrayed as betrayer, bleeding 'from pride' rather than from the heart, the adorer 'sick of forgiving/such honesty', a purity of response forbidden to mortals. The final lyric resolves such unending pain, 'this wound that will not heal', by immersing the poet in the 'lovers' well' of sorrow^{I25} and thus killing desire through oblivion, 'depths of non-being'; such abstract suffering is not worth its brief illuminations. Typically for Hill, however, the poem ends ambiguously, 'my desire dying/as I desire', either as wished or through satiety. This sweet masochism of love, sacred or profane, is developed in 'Lachrimae'.

'Lachrimae', dolefully following the 'few tears/of wax' of 'The Pentecost Castle', again derives a newly created artefact from past fragments, here principally the martyrdom of Robert Southwell^{I26} expressed in a form drawn from the stately music of John Dowland and Peter Philips,^{I27} while the final sonnet is closely based on, again, a Spanish lyric by Lope de Vega^{I28}. It also has deep roots in Hill's own work, the consideration of martyrdom and the processes of history in 'Funeral Music' (another sonnet sequence), the meditation on ~~at~~ the crucifixion in 'Canticle for Good Friday' and, glancingly, in the central poems of 'The Pentecost Castle', and the princely violence of Mercian Hymns, all here transformed into 'seven passionate Pavans'. The first sonnet, 'Lachrimae Verae', places Christ as the one still point in a turning world, moving only through the tears of the believer, himself responsible, mimetically, for Christ's torture, 'your body twisted by our skill'. The poet is aware, through this 'eternal loss', of his own innate sinfulness, 'I cannot turn aside from what I do'. 'The Masque of Blackness', based on Ben Jonson's extravagant and similarly unreal spectacle^{I29}, describes attempts to overcome the 'tenebrae' of religious faith, 'brilliance made bearable', through Amor, the greed of 'Midas' feast, and 'self-love', a masquerade which, like all the 'new heavens' created by man vanishes in a 'chaos of the dark'. Like the earlier 'dispossessed' of 'The Pentecost Castle', the adherents to this 'splendour of life' are slaves to 'fashion and remark' just as the poet is to Christ, answering 'your lords of revenue', such slavery as inevitable as it is disagreeable. Sonnet 3, 'Martyrium', expresses suffering not direct but, as in 'The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian', through the medium of art, 'fading tapestries' which transforms tears, lachrimae, into brooches, pain into ornament, ignoring the 'streaked gibbet' for the unmoved onlooker, 'Jesus-faced' not with thorns but flies. 'Clamorous love' has no part in this stillness, as false to life as the 'celestial wordliness' of the previous poem, transfigured like the heat of earth into 'vernicles of summer air'. The fourth sonnet, 'Lachrimae Coactae', returns to the central Christian paradox, earlier worried at in 'The Pentecost Castle', Christ as the 'crucifier who crucifies'.

The ritual thorn of 'Pentecost Castle' section 3 is now 'rakish', a mere device, Christ more impressively realised as 'innermost true light' - as opposed to the false brilliance of sonnet 2 - and, like Offa, 'king of our earth', the same earth that was thwarted in the previous poem. This is of little help, however, to the worshipper, caught between 'harsh grace and hurtful scorn' just as he is 'frightened of hell' and yet burns in vain to 'be enamoured of your paradise'. Christ remains unhelpful, in a pun 'not caring' to reveal the secret of his 'quiet'. 'Pavana Dolorosa' develops the 'void embrace' of the previous sonnet in terms of 'self-wounding martyrdom', seen as based in self-regard and self-interest, an 'ascetic opulence' itself a 'passion amorous of love'. Like the masquerade of sonnet 2 these loves and passions (an ironic inversion of the sequences' epigram) are merely 'real' in their 'pretence', like Christ on the cross an image of stillness,

'music's creation of the moveless dance,
the decreation to which all must move',¹³⁰

yet another set of paradoxes, silence 'an ecstasy of sound', night moves which 'blaze upon the day', seeking eternity in the purely transitional, 'I stay amid the things that will not stay'. Sonnet 6, 'Lachrimae Antiquae Novae', however, unites present and past and, through developing the motifs of the earlier 'Pentecost Castle' at last begins to come to terms with the 'Crucified Lord'. Themes of betrayal - the 'judas kiss' of supposed devotion - emblematic 'icons' - the 'fading tapestries' of 3 - and the 'token spear' of the crucifixion - the 'blade' which earlier pierced the heron - all cohere as 'scentings of love', Offa's kind of dominion 'swallowed with your blood'. This sonnet also brings to culmination the mercantile imagery, previously alluded to in 'Of Commerce and Society' and the coinage of Mercian Hymns, which Hill sees as underlying the temporal world, 'Midas' feast', 'eyes of diamond', 'brooches of crimson tears', 'ascetic opulence' and, here, Christ 'bowed beneath the gold'. In contrast, Christ is 'naked to the world', his death recalling his birth, 'longings incarnate in the carnal child', both 'fulfilling' (adjective as well as verb) 'triumphs of the festal year'. These 'penances' are redeemed in the final sonnet, 'Lachrimae Amantis', grief and love made one.

Hill welds together an earlier religious sonnet, again from the Spanish^{I31}, and the side altarpiece of his old Oxford college^{I32}, two dissimilar icons which nevertheless both humbly portray Christ's own boundless humility, to conclude these 'lachrimae' with proper supplication. The pose of earlier sonnets is seen in all its true coldness, a heart which 'keeps itself religiously secure' by denying the true Christ, winter's 'dark solstice' after the 'summer air' of false martyrdom. Christ's death is seen as part of ritual, 'frost and fire', and as endlessly recurring, each solstice 'your passion's ancient wounds must bleed anew'. Nevertheless, these final tears are 'amantis', of love, and the sequence closes, as did Mercian Hymns, with a dream, a more complex development of Lope de Vega's admission of endless procrastination.^{I33} Hill turns this into 'urgent comfort', the poet 'half-faithful', ambivalent as ever but still strenuously hoping to be convinced,

'bathed in pure tones of promise and remorse:

'tomorrow I shall wake to welcome him',^{I34}.

It is typical for Hill that this final response is encased in quotation marks, (it could be said that these, direct or concealed in later notes have replaced the many brackets of Hill's earlier, similarly unsure, work), and this really points to the central weakness of 'Lachrimae', however stunning its execution. Hill relies on sources as the only concrete morality; his own attempts at myth-making here, albeit from impeccable Catholic sources, are not fully realized for outsiders to this myth system, indeed legend moves unfortunately close to its less welcome bedfellow, simple superstition.

'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England',^{I35} approaches legend more successfully - it is by far the closest in tone in the four main movements of Tenebrae to Mercian Hymns - by abandoning Catholic legends for those of native myths of England, here not 8th century Mercia but the Victorian Age, not the making of an Empire but its gradual dissolution. The first poem - like 'Lachrimae' this is a sequence of sonnets, though the same division into two 4 and two 3 line stanzas is less verbally rigid - takes up the earlier themes of Tenebrae, and transmutes them in this

specifically English setting, Shakespeare's 'quaint mazes',^{I36} evoking the same ancient mystery as the poems of earth in Mercian Hymns, 'lords of unquiet', 'the sacred well', 'the hidden shrine', but both ancient myth and Christian belief under peril of dissolution in the modern world, newer bonfires -

'It is the ravage of the heron wood;
it is the rood blazing upon the green',^{I37}.

'Linnaean pentecosts' re-occur, this 'pronged light' at last materialising to make the 'chilly fountains burn' but no more genuine than in 'The Pentecost Castle' (the architectural metaphor is also built upon). Indeed, the 'religion of the heart' of the first two sequences is seen as a mere substitute for - or adjunct to - 'sweet carnality', its 'hawk's head' (as in section 5) 'twitched off' like an uncircumcised penis, and its artistic heritage (Hill is too apt in his self-criticism here) mere 'old hymns of servitude'. 'An Apology' is far more than that, fortunately, dealing rather with a variant of Disraeli's 'two nations', not rich and poor but 'spiritual Platonic old England' and the 'New World', the glories of the past and the hopes of the future.

'Damon's Lament for his Clorinda, Yorkshire 1654' places, disconcertingly,
^{I38}
yet another Spanish lyric in three varying contexts, the pastoral mode, the topography of Yorkshire and Cromwell's Commonwealth but, more importantly, unites the collection's two mastering images, the 'masked threshold' of 'Christ the deceiver' and 'The Masque of Blackness' and the cold 'region of mirrors', both of the earlier 'Funeral Music' and of the close of 'Tenebrae'. The clown who is seen 'doffing his mask' to 'selfless raptures that are all his own' here could well be Hill himself, Sacheverell Sitwell (to whom the sonnet was first dedicated, as were others in this sequence to other ageing writers bound for Celidon; George Barker and Shakespeare^{I39}) or the grieving shepherd, his child 'put down', but, like Offa, he seems more representative, a touchstone for the coming dissolution. 'Who are these coming to the Sacrifice' continues this process, the ageing both of an individual and the whole race. The gothic revival in church building, 'new-burgeoned spires', itself a celebration not of God but war and commerce - 'praise-worthy feuds' - and a petrification of the past while 'the young ferns root among our

vitriified tears'. The hot elopement of the past, for all its parody of the conventions of Victorian prose (Hill's sense of humour does not desert him here as it does with Christian myth) - 'scattered kinsmen flung buckshot and bridles' - is now redundant, and it was love, not the lovers, which 'fled, truly outwitted, through a swirl of long-laid dust'. The vitality of the past is tarnished, 'stiff with the bric-a-brac of loss and gain' - as stuffy as Victorian design - and, in a chilling pun, the poet suggests coming retribution. 'Guarding its pane/the spider looms against another storm', both weaving its web of entanglement and ominously rearing up, presager of future tragedy, perhaps further illness for the bride 'still not quite yourself' perhaps the dismembering of Empire, for which this sonnet is so obviously a metaphor.

The next three poems, 'A Short History of British India', present just that, although it is the loss of this heritage which is most stressed, in particular through the counter-invasion of Indian myth into England. Sonnet 4 reduces this 'once-monstrous theme' to 'miniatures' (Hill's patented method) in its picture of English brutality, destroying 'forts and palaces' - a less fruitful approach to architecture - polluting the wells of both the final poem in 'The Pentecost Castle' and 'Quaint Mazes', and censoring this destruction, 'impound the memoirs for their bankrupt shame'. This bloodlust is carried out as an adjunct of the 'faith' celebrated in the first two sequences, a savage pentecost - 'the grace of visitation' - which expresses itself, as in the previous sonnets, through sexual metaphor, 'Jagannath's lovers', the 'rutting' cannon and the concluding rape of India's 'god-quests',

'in conclave of abiding injuries,
sated upon the stillness of the bride',¹⁴⁰.

Sonnet 5 sees India fighting back, 'patient for our destruction', although the 'alien conscience' of the English is never really assimilated anyhow, swamped by the mysteries of India, mocking the 'law-books' of the English, their real destiny to lose themselves 'among the ruins'. Indian myth counteracts, through its gentleness, the violence of the previous sonnet - 'Krishna from Radha lovingly untwines' - its full mysticism expressed in terms

of light, the 'flame-tree', 'bride-bed of light' (uniting this with sexuality), 'flittering candles of the wayside shrines' and the sun which, unlike in sonnet 2, 'surmounts the dust'. The 'tenebrae' seem at last banished. Sonnet 6 records, alternatively, the genuine losses of empire, the 'clear theme of justice and order' with its concomitant 'ascetic pastimes', banished by the complex sensuality of India and now at one with ancient tombs and modern ruins, themselves the heirs of the English, 'railway sidings and small aerodromes'. It is such technology, not the wished civilization, which the English have bequeathed, and India's rich multiplicity - not to mention duplicity - is not affected, indeed it has come over to quietly invade the invader,

'India's a peacock-shrine next to a shop
selling mangola, sitars, lucky charms,
heavenly Buddhas smiling in their sleep"¹⁴¹.

'Loss and Gain' transfers this elegy to a country churchyard, the 'brown stumps of headstones' evoking Coleridge's 'Platonic England' and its 'ruinously strong' endurance, (in England if not in India) grasping its 'tenantry' over the processes of Nature, a synthesis of decay and rootedness,

'where wild-eyed poppies raddle tawny farms
and wild swans root in lily-clouded lakes'¹⁴².

This does not really comfort, however, for, unlike the dreams of Offa, the 'twin forms of sleep and waking', the duality of this lost England, cannot counteract 'sudden light' - the false brightness of 'The Masque of Blackness' - and the equivalent falseness inherent in this civilization, the 'phantoms of untold mistakes'. This is itself a pun, further duplicity, untolled like the bells of the opening which do not ring, merely echoing inward like the whole sequence. 'Vocations' deals with an attempt to counteract such betrayal. Dedicated to another 'ageing poet', George Barker, who has 'defected' neither from the political beliefs expressed in Calamiterror¹⁴³ nor from his determination to live solely by his poetry, furniture (another form of architecture) is, as elsewhere in this sequence, seen as reflecting states of mind. His room 'furnished with the stuff of martyrdom' (another of Hill's emblematical martyr-poets), Barker draws, like Hill in Mercian Hymns, on

'your own shire' and thus more properly summons 'Platonic England', reflecting like the man in the previous sonnet 'radiance of dreams' but here 'hardly to be denied', these dreams closely reflecting the epiphanies of Nature - the 'twittering pipistrelle' similarly 'curt' (like Offa's name), the children, again like Offa, 'clear-calling as they fade'. The following poem, 'The Laurel Axe', further evokes this genuine strength of 'Platonic England', despite the loss of empire and the Raj and its own, closer, opponents

'replete with complex fortunes that are gone,
beset by dynasties of moods and clouds',^{I44}.

I45

In a recent broadcast, Hill has set out both the attraction and inherent falseness of this vision, however, and here too it is also seen as the very worst kind of myth, a sentimental picture created by a mercantile society (as in 'Of Commerce and Society') to justify its power and financial might,

'the mannerly extortions, languid praise,
all that devotion long since bought and sold',^{I46}.

This vision is essentially frozen and artificial, maintained through precious art in 'cabinets of amethyst and frost', resting on and in 'its laurels'. The 'smoky wings' of decaying autumn recur as the similarly doubtful 'wooden wings of justice' in sonnet IO, 'Fidelities', faithfulness - as 'Lachrimae' - itself again in doubt. Platonic England is evoked through one of its communities, the settled order of nuns, who evoke, through their ceremonies, beliefs and quiet order, this supposed state of calm. Emotion is again transfigured into architecture, the Reverend Mother feasting her 'constraint on terracotta and alabaster' just as she does on Hell and Heaven, 'brimstone and the sweets of Paradise'. Ceremony is similarly ambivalent, compulsory - 'must' - 'empty', surrounded by 'well-wishers and spies', and 'betrothed' to celibacy, 'chilled' by the lilies of 'Loss and Gain' and implicitly contrasted with the warm coupling of Khrishna and Radha earlier in the sequence. Stanza three relates this to the doubts of the modern world, life 'decrees' reduced to 'good bedside reading' which comforts not the holy but the 'lost', a 'modest balm' far removed from the nagging doubts of 'Lachrimae'. The patent unease of the final stanza could apply either to the nuns

troubled by the stirrings of sexuality - 'all night the cisterns whisper in the roof' - who nevertheless pray to the early fathers - 'we close our eyes to Anselm' - or the poet who blocks Anselm from his mind and yet still is kept awake by this unease of architecture, the cisterns an ironic sound from the heavens, a less incantatory 'lovers well'.

The next two poems rewrite Victorian poems - only the name remains the same - in terms of this new unease. 'Idylls of the King' replace Tennyson's *Arthurian*^{I47} with a more modern loss of kingship but one, too, with the possibility of future return. Nature yields to human architecture, the processes which produced Offa - badger-run and heath-fern - now a 'weightless magnificence' attesting to the power of the past which, like Offa, vanishes, the 'dark leaves that flick to silver' recalling the 'silverdark' of *Mercian Hymns* XXVIII which also attests to a lost race, fled like the dove, too 'untidy' for the new order, from this 'long-sought and forsaken ground'. The 'new estate' (for which Offa was earlier seen as 'contractor'), however, is already impermanent its 'half-built' ruins already prey to invading nature and, more apocalyptically future holocaust (maybe the fleeing dove is an emblem of departing peace), 'warheads of mushrooms round the filter pond'. Sonnet 12, 'The Eve of Saint Mark', describes Keats' heroine^{I48} grown old, defying the gathering gloom with 'broochlight' - closer to the enhancing light of 'A Short History of British India (II)' than the uncomfortable reality of the 'sudden light' of 'Loss and Gain' - and a petrification of Nature, the 'owl immortal in its crystal dome', frozen like the earlier 'cabinets of amethyst' and, indeed, the final image of the whole collection. Time is not conquered, of course; the clock, like death, and unlike the unsounded bell of 'Loss and Gain', 'discounts us with a telling chime'. Like Barker and Offa - the 'boy-king' - the poet's godmother (another childhood memory along with Gran who lights the gas) is most truly at home in her dreams, here freezing, again, the past in the same continuum as the 'sepia waterglass' of her photographs (the 'evergreen albums' of *Mercian Hymns*), 'virgin' and as inviolate as the nuns of 'Fidelities', the 'lost delicate suitors who could sing'.

Indeed, music could be seen as the 'Christian architecture' of the whole book - these suitors, the Spanish songs of the 'Pentecost Castle', the Latin Catholic sung Mass which lies behind both 'Lachrimae' and 'Tenebrae', the chorale-preludes based 'on melodies of Paul Celan' and the cantata-text 'Ad Incensum Lucernae' from which other poems derive - and this sequence fittingly concludes with another rewritten text, 'The Herefordshire Carol'. The kingdom, both of 'Platonic England' and Offa, is celebrated in its natural state, winter and darkness (not the autumn of 9 or the Easter of 10 and the light neither of 5 or 7) and in its true state, 'an enclave of perpetual vows/broken in time'. Time, which brought the end of the Raj and the age of Hill's godmother, also brings decay, the hidden shrine of 'Quaint Mazes' now 'disfigured!', the fake wisdom of 'Old Moore's astrology'. The old order is discredited in this Disraeli's 'New World' - 'the squire's effigy' crowned only with frost - but similarly the 'ruined maids' of the past now laugh at such social disgrace, the virginity of earlier poems (the nuns and the distant cousins) now a burden carefully but gratefully cast aside;

'In grange and cottage girls rise from their beds
by candlelight and mend their ruined braids',¹⁵⁰.

The sequence closes therefore on a note of hope, 'Platonic England' existing not to stifle but bring meaning to the present, showing 'disrepair' as set against its platonic truths (as in the 'exemplary cave' which opens 'Funeral Music'?) and yet, like Offa, revivifying the modern world. It is not, as feared in 'The Laurel Axe', merely a myth created to justify commerce and power but a genuine legend, again created by the poet, which can evoke harmony, Nature and light at last united through art and a destruction of the image-making prevalent in 'Lachrimae' for a more natural kingdom, 'essence of the year', evoked, endearingly, through yet another pun -

'Touched by the cry of the iconoclast,
how the rose-window blossoms with the sun',¹⁵¹.

The remaining poems in Tenebrae move back, unfortunately, from newly created legend to Catholic, received, myth, from light to religious darkness, from humour and urgent imagery to private concerns and doctrinal gloom.

'Tenebrae' itself is preceded by six somewhat occasional poems, dealing mainly with the gulf between faith and art. Most impressive are 'Two Chorale-Preludes' dealing with the discontinuity between (Latin) faith and (German) doubt; section I drawing on the frost, ice and solitude of the previous sequence to stress our distance from Heaven, the 'land called Lost/at peace inside our heads', section 2 taking the luxuriance of midsummer Nature to provide 'fresh traces of lost origin' and a vision of true faith itself growing out of scavenging - the horse-flies and the lichen both suckle sweetness from others. The attempt to preserve such insights in art informs the next two poems, though once again this is shot through with irony. 'A Pre-Raphaelite Notebook' examines this process more directly, the 'God-ejected Word' coming to earth not as poetry but as Christ the scavenger, who 'resorts to flesh, procures carrion, satisfies/its white hunger', these images working on the Pre-Raphaelites, the 'power of flies' again distracting 'the workings of our souls'. Such images, the 'miry skull', 'viscous wounds' of earth, and the 'gold worm' in this 'pierced slime', inform even the Mass, reinvigorating 'the stale head/sauced in original blood', sacrifice again bringing what could almost be a description of Tenebrae as a whole, 'cries of rapture and despair'. 'Terribilis Est Locus Iste' draws on another, roughly contemporary, school of art to explicate this 'strangeness', turning Nature into emblems, the marigold field 'in paint runnily embossed', to counteract the 'solitude' first located in 'Ave Regina Coelorum' and, like the iconoclast in 'The Herefordshire Carol' renouncing the fallen seraphs of the Pre-Raphaelite 'the renounced/self portrait with a seraph and a storm' (just as 'marginal angels' - both of little use and squeezed to the corners of 'the month's accounts - are 'lightning-sketched'). In 'Veni Coronaberis', this pattern, 'the vivid severance of each day', is disrupted by a kind of resurrection, 'the crocus armies from the dead', though this is part of a larger, similarly cyclical and doomed process, 'the realm of love renews/the battle it was bound to lose'. Kingship is united with abnegation, death for Christ with public praise - 'abstinence crowns all our care/with martyr-laurels' - but the poem's most enhancing duality, the flowering of human architecture as if natural, 'old

stones blossom in the south', loses much of its impact with Hill's revision of the poem's final two lines, resolving mystery through paradox,

'The towers of Cluny, what are they?
The flowers of Cluny as they are',¹⁵².

'Florentines', a dark nightmare vision of the dead endlessly replaying their lives, both 'damnable and serene', and 'Christmas Trees', paying tribute to yet another martyr-intellectual who 'restores the broken themes of praise' through the 'logic' of sacrifice, lead the reader into the final, and title, poem, 'Tenebrae', a sombre culmination of earlier gloom and doubts which brings, deliberately, no final reconciliation.

Deriving its title from the offices of Holy Week - Catholic ritual celebrating, through its myths, the death of Christ - and the Latin of the Vulgate (like 'Lachrimae' - chilly poems titled from a chilly language) - pointing to ghosts, darkness, shadows - 'Tenebrae' presents not resolution but final despair, the 'cold region' of both Dante's Hell and the Cythera of ageing artists, like the dried-up Holst whose 'brain was numb and his spirit... isolated',¹⁵³. As in 'The Pentecost Castle', sexual and divine love are united for their power not to save but to damn. Section I presents Eros, likewise, as an angel of death and grief who 'stoops' to his own sacrifice, a flawed Lazarus who, as in 'History as Poetry', fails to resurrect except in pain. Eros and Lazarus coalesce in section 2 into Christ, his 'soft and searching' voice disturbing the poet in sleep, waking him from 'forgetfulness', false ecstasies' to a proper desolation, truth sustained 'as you sustain each item of your cross'. The love of Christ is the proper end of the poet's 'quest', a duality of desire and pain foreseen in the two epigraphs to 'The Pentecost Castle' and here reaching its height of both expression and cruelty,

'As I am passionate so you with pain
turn my desire; as you seem passionless
so I recoil from all that I would gain',¹⁵⁴.

Christ's immortality is seen as quite beyond mortal man, - 'quite out of this world' and 'not in our time' - receiving only echoes to his prayers, these

Tenebrae, and dwelling in the love of sin and lust, 'Amor Carnalis'. Section 4 shows such insights as available only through legend, in yet another pun 'our faith is in our festivals', visited briefly by time and Christ's 'light of light'. Section 5 returns to Hell, the myth of the Succubus - a devil supposed to mate with sleeping men - used to symbolise these 'stupefying images of grief-in-dream' in sexual love, the immortality of the damned who 'will not desert/your love nor lose him in some blank of time'. The final three sections substitute, thankfully, ambiguous images for ambiguous thought. Section 6 seems to recreate Celidon, the landscape half-way between Heaven and Hell in which the whole collection is set, mingling 'obscene consent' and 'purest praise', a 'true marriage' not of lovers but the 'self-in-self', an ambiguous merging of slaughter and religious vision, 'the ash-pit of the lily-fire'. Section 7 traces the same ambiguity in the figure of Christ (as with Offa also hinting at the poet as well) who 'wounds with ecstasy' and unites kingship and sacrifice, 'he wears the martyr's crown'. As in 'Lachrimae', Christ is 'Weeper of the Valedictions' (this sudden frenzy of capital letters seems deliberately overdone), a figure from native legend come to spread chaos,

'He is Lord of Misrule.

He is the Master of the Leaping Figures',¹⁵⁵

The poem, and collection, ends with music - the songs of 'The Pentecost Castle', the stately dance of 'Lachrimae', the sung responses of the Mass - itself seen as an element of myth, 'Angel of Tones, Medusa, Queen of the Air', and the similarly impenetrable, ultimately - perhaps like Hill's own work - offering no wider insights, merely reflecting back on itself and us, a cold beauty which is really its own reward, transmuting life, through legend, into art,

'and when we would accost her with real cries
silver on silver thrills itself to ice',¹⁵⁶

as cold as the phoenix in 'Genesis'. Hill's creation of new legend from the bones of the past - Offa, the Wars of the Roses, an imagined poet, colonial England, Christ himself - composes, like music, 'her own sphere', an alchemy which discovers in the everyday 'like a revealed mineral, a new earth',¹⁵⁷ fresh myths for the unfallen.

Notes.

1. Christopher Ricks, 'Geoffrey Hill and the Tongue's Atrocities', W. D. Thomas Memorial Lecture, University College Swansea 1978, reprinted Times Literary Supplement, 30 June 1978, pp743-747.
2. Kenneth Allott, The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse 2nd ed., Harmondsworth 1962, p 391.
3. Ibid, pp 391-3.
4. Ibid, p 393.
5. See, for example, 'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'; A Debate', Agenda 9⁴-10¹, Autumn-Winter 1971/2, pp14-23, an exceptionally difficult, though rewarding essay on syntax which the poet himself describes as a 'brief and inconclusive debate'(p 14), a revealing phrase on Hill's inner self-interrogation.
6. See the editor's introduction to Poetry of the Committed Individual: A Stand Anthology of Poetry, ed Jon Silkin, Harmondsworth 1973, especially pp31-4. Stand, for example, first published 'Funeral Music', though Hill's more recent work has appeared more frequently in Agenda.
7. Jon Silkin, 'The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill', British Poetry since 1960, ed. Michael Schmidt and Grevel Lindop, Oxford 1972, pp143-164.
8. Christopher Ricks, 'Geoffrey Hill and the Tongue's Atrocities', p 743 (See also 'Cliche as 'Responsible Speech'', London Magazine, Nov 1964).
9. John Haffenden, 'From Ibsen to Hill', PN Review Vol 6, No 1 (1978) p25. Hill's version of Ibsen's Brand lies behind the persona of Tenebrae with his moral imperiousness, a trait also dissected in Mercian Hymns.
10. K. Allot, p 392.
11. For The Unfallen, London 1959, 3rd revised impression 1971 (incorporating the revised version of 'In Memory of Jane Fraser' as amended in the note which concludes King Log).
12. Ibid, p 51.
13. Ibid, p 59.
14. Ibid, p 43. Dove Cottage, of course, is a reference to Wordsworth's house.
15. Ibid, p 17. Compare 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal course' in Wordsworth's 'A Slumber did my spirit seal', Poetical Works, Oxford 1936 p 149, and the six days of Creation in the Biblical Genesis, to which this poem provides an alternative creation myth.
16. Ibid, p 21. Christ is the 'Bidden Guest' of the title.
17. In King Log (p 70) Hill states that he dislikes the poem very much, but this revision, a 'penitential exercise', reveals its importance to Hill.

18. For the Unfallen, p 23.
19. Deuteronomy, Chapter 5.
20. For the Unfallen, p 18.
21. Ibid, p 19. The title refers back to the two poems of the same title in William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience (Complete Writings, ed. G. Keynes, London 1957 pp 121-2, 211-2) which also deal with childhood and the fall of innocence.
22. Ibid, pp 28-9. Again deriving from Christian legend, this poem is based on an obscure incident in the Apocrypha (Tobit, Chapter 3), the angel Raphael's defeat of the evil spirit Asmodeus, slayer of Sarah's previous seven husbands on their marriage nights.
23. Ibid, p 38.
24. Ibid, p 47.
25. Ibid, p 58
26. Ibid, p 56.
27. Also cf section 4, 'Death by Water', in Eliot's The Waste Land.
28. For the Unfallen, p 38.
29. Ibid, p 45. This poem is based on an incident in the Aeneid, Jackson Knight's translation, Harmondsworth, 1956, pp 147-174, 'The Visit to the Underworld'.
30. Ibid, p 26. The title, of course, comes from H. Rider Haggard's novel.
31. Ibid, p 20.
32. Ibid, p 11.
33. Ibid, p 55.
34. Holderlin's work, with its ideal of Hellenic perfection achieved despite, or through, great mental suffering has been magnificently reworked into English by David Gascoyne in Holderlin's Madness, London 1938.
35. Simone Weil, First and Last Notebooks, transl. R. Rees, London 1970, p ix.
36. For the Unfallen, p 53.
37. This is, of course, a central theme in the work of Henry James, to whom the poem is 'in homage'.
38. Michael Schmidt, 50 Modern British Poets, London 1979, p 402.
39. King Log, London 1968, p 9.
40. See Fables of Aesop, transl. A. Handford, Harmondsworth 1954.
41. Ibid, p 44.

42. Pregchiere, Northern House Poets, School of English, University of Leeds, 1964. The poems, all reprinted in King Log, were 'Men are a mockery of angels', 'Domaine public', 'A Prayer to the Sun', 'Three Baroque Meditations', 'The Assisi Fragments', 'Ovid in the Third Reich', 'The Imaginative Life', and 'History as Poetry', which contained an extra third stanza omitted from King Log, dealing with the Inquisition,

'Glittering instruments; sober priests
 Who now beyond danger memorise
 The names in error and justice drawn
 From oblivion, blood-embroiled souls'.
43. Times Literary Supplement, 25 August 1966
44. Jeffrey Wainwright, 'The Speechless Dead', Stand 10^I 1968, pp 44-49.
45. See note 7.
46. See note 1.
47. William S. Milne, 'Creative Tact', Critical Quarterly 20⁴, Winter 1978, p 40
48. A literal translation would be 'She does not sin, who can say that she has not sinned: it is only by admitting her guilt that she makes herself wicked!'
49. Kenneth Allott, pp 392-3.
50. Jeffrey Wainwright, p 44.
51. See Silkin pp 145-7 for a very fine discussion of this poem.
52. King Log, p 21. As Plato died naturally in bed, perhaps Socrates' death is alluded to through his pupil.
53. Ibid, pp 67-8.
54. Ibid, p 25; see also Plato, The Republic, transl H. Lee, Harmondsworth 1955, Book VII, 514a, pp 278-281.
55. Ibid, p 26.
56. Ibid, p 27.
57. Ibid, p 31.
58. Ibid, pp 32. Compare Christ's last words from the Cross, 'It is finished'.
59. Ibid, p 31. For a different interpretation of this sequence see Merle Brown, 'Funeral Music', Agenda 17^I (Spring 1979) pp 72 - 88.
60. Ibid, p 40.
61. See, for example, Myth and Miracle, London 1929.
62. Cf Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, chapter 9: London 1847.
63. Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, London 1847.

64. King Log, p 45.
65. Ibid, p 46.
66. Ibid, p 47.
67. Derwent May, 'Recognizing the Damned', Review 20 (March 1969), p 55.
The same issue, p 67, contains two, not over-competent, parodies of Hill's style.
68. Jeffrey Wainwright, p 49.
69. Hill is to expand his interest in Spanish lyrics in 'The Pentecost Castle'.
70. King Log p 53.
71. It is pedantic, but entertaining, to note here the recurrence of dates ending in 2; Hill's own birth in 1932, the corresponding subject of 'September Song' - 'born 19.6.32 - deported 24.9.42' - the battle of Shiloh Church in 1862 in 'Locust Songs' and Arruruz's supposed death in 1922 - more somberly, Miguel Hernandez of 'A Prayer to the Sun' was starved and tortured to death in Spain in 1942.
72. King Log p 61.
73. Hill obviously indicates here that some later hand has supposedly arranged this sequence into a non-chronological order - Arruruz could hardly do it himself posthumously. Certainly the poems are made more poignant by the reader's knowledge that Arruruz is very soon to die.
74. King Log p 63: Wainwright points out (p 49) that this poem is 'the sounding or imagining of a last despair, a poem pretending that a tired skill has has no more interest than to write a poem in which each line occupies the the same amount of type space'.
75. Mercian Hymns, London 1971.
76. Martin Dodsworth, Stand, Vol 13 (1971) p 63.
77. Silkin, p 158.
78. William S. Milne, 'Geoffrey Hill's Mercian Hymns', Ariel 10^I, January 1979, p 54. The equal of Milne's earlier fine essay on King Log.
79. Poetry Book Society Bulletin, Summer 1971.
80. See Milne pp46-7 about Hill's method of reading around a poetic subject.
81. 'Redeeming the Time', Agenda 10⁴-11^I, (1972-3), pp87-III.
82. Christopher Ricks, 'Mercian Hymns', Listener 26 August 1971.
83. 'The True Conduct of Human Judgement': Some Observations on Cymbeline' in The Morality of Art, London 1969, pp18-32.

84. C. V. Pritchard, English Medieval Graffiti, Cambridge 1967, figure 20.
85. Milne, p 57.
86. Silkin, pp158-9.
87. See Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Oxford 1967, pp184-196, 284-286.
88. C.H.Sisson, Essays 1967; the epigraph comes from the introduction, p 7.
89. See note II to Mercian Hymns: these notes are, like those to Eliot's The Waste Land, half serious, half facetious.
90. These notes provide a further gloss on Mercian Hymns, more mirrors on mirrors. The title of this television programme, 'Call My Bluff' may itself be an ironic comment on Hill's method.
91. Mercian Hymns V.
92. Ceolred was a previous king of Mercia, ruling from 709-716.
93. The Waste Land again seems alluded to. See Michael Launchbury, 'Geoffrey Hill's 'Mercian Hymns'', Delta, Spring 1972, p 47.
94. James Joyce, Dubliners, London 1914.
95. See Mercian Studies, ed. Ann Dornier, Leicester 1977, p 206. This anthology of recent essays on Mercian history and archeology is of great interest.
96. See the entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica for a concise study of Offa's historical importance and the few facts known about his reign.
97. As Hill's own note indicates, this is an ironic reference to Roland's horn in La Chanson de Roland; see The Song of Roland, transl. Dorothy Sayers, Harmondsworth, 1957, p 120.
98. Offa greatly championed his own son Egfrith, securing papal approval for his consecration.
99. It is significant that Enoch Powell's infamous speech on racialism, which also quoted this passage, was made in the Midlands.
100. Mercian Hymns XXII.
101. See the final two chapters in Mercian Studies, on, in turn, Mercian sculpture and art.
102. Latin for 'And I await the resurrection of the dead.'
103. John Ruskin, Works, London 1903-12, XXIX, pp170-180. Ruskin was, of course, both an art and social critic.
104. As Hill indicates, ~~Shakespeare's~~ ^{Shakespeare's} Henry V, V, Chorus, 23.

- I05. Mercian Hymns XXX.
- I06. Peter Levi, 'Geoffrey Hill', Agenda 9^I-10^I (1971-2), p 100.
- I07. Tenebrae, London 1978.
- I08. Ibid, p 44.
- I09. The epigraph is taken from Sidney Keyes poem 'The Sour Land', Collected Poems London 1945 pp 15-17, which describes the ancient tower where Pope completed Book 5 of his version of the Iliad. The poem continues
 'where lives no love, nor any kind of flower -
 only the running demon, thought!.
- II0. 'Perplexed Persistence': The Exemplary Failure of T.H.Green', Poetry Nation 4 (1975) p 144.
- III. Edwin Morgan, 'Vigorous Tears', Listener 7 June 1979, p 790.
- II2. Agenda 17^I; Spring 1979, 'Geoffrey Hill Special Issue'.
- II3. Ibid, p 6; Jeffrey Wainwright, 'An Essay on Geoffrey Hill's Tenebrae'.
- II4. Ibid, p 13; John Peck, 'Tenebrae'.
- II5. Ibid, pp 43-60; Cathrael Kazin, 'Lachrimae'.
- II6. Ibid, p 70; W.S.Milne, 'Lachrimae'.
- II7. Ibid, p 41; John Bayley, 'A Retreat or Seclusion'.
- II8. The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse, ed J.M.Cohen, Harmondsworth 1956 provides the basis for Hill's work - see Peck p 18 for precise correspondence of Spanish originals and Hill's crafted versions.
- II9. Agenda 10⁴-11^I, p 68; the epigraph comes from R.O.Jones, A Literary History of Spain, 1971, II, 87-8.
- I20. Peck, p 18.
- I21. See Cohen pp 113-4.
- I22. The first version of section 8, printed in Agenda 11⁴-12² p 54-5, has been radically revised for this volume, a sign of either the care or uncertainty with which Hill treated this project; the poem opens with
 'Jesus my poor heart's treasure' and stanza 2 is completely different,
 'Your friendship so forsaken
 your wrath so long denied
 all earthly bliss is broken
 as your disfigured side'.
 As other revisions show, Hill later eschewed such directness.
- I23. See Cohen p 114.

- I24. Tenebrae p 13.
- I25. See Cohen p 118.
- I26. For the best introduction to this work see Jeffrey Wainwright, 'Geoffrey Hill's Lachrimae', Agenda 13³, Autumn 1975.
- I27. See Kazin p 43-4.
- I28. See Kazin p 60 for text and translation.
- I29. It also draws on a Spanish lyric, see Kazin p 59 for text and translation.
- I30. Tenebrae p 19.
- I31. See note I28.
- I32. Hill's college, Keble, owns one of the two versions of Holman Hunt's much reproduced painting 'The Light of the World'.
- I33. Kazin p 60, 'and how often...I would reply, "I will open to him tomorrow", only to make the same reply again the following day'.
- I34. Tenebrae p 21.
- I35. The title is taken from Pugin's work of the same name.
- I36. A Midsummer Nights Dream Act II, Scene I, line 99.
- I37. Tenebrae, p 22. Compare the twin bonfires of Mercian Hymns III and XIX.
- I38. See Cohen p 202.
- I39. As Hill notes, sonnets I, 7 and II were originally dedicated to Shakespeare. sonnets 3, 8 and 12 to George Barker; and 2 to Sacheverell Sitwell.
- I40. Tenebrae, p 24.
- I41. Ibid, p 27.
- I42. Ibid, p 28.
- I43. George Barker, Calamiterror, London 1937.
- I44. Tenebrae, p 30
- I45. Broadcast on BBC Radio 3, August 6th 1979, Hill read and discussed poems mainly from Tenebrae.
- I46. Tenebrae, p 30.
- I47. Tennyson's Idylls of the King (1859) expresses a similar duality, public morality and private doubt.
- I48. Keats' The Eve of Saint Mark, written in 1819, presents a less complex legend.
- I49. 'Christmas Trees' and sections 4, 6 and 8 of 'Tenebrae' itself.

- I50. Tenebrae, p 54. Cf the 'broochlight' of the previous poem.
- I51. Ibid, p 54; 'touched' means both 'illuminated by' and 'affected by'.
- I52. 'Ecce Tempus', Poetry Nation 3, p 6.
- I53. Imogen Holst, The Music of Gustav Holst, 2nd ed, London 1968.
- I54. Tenebrae, p 42.
- I55. Ibid, p 44.
- I56. Ibid, p 44
- I57. For the Unfallen, p 58.
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CHAPTER FOUR.

MYTH AS ARCHETYPE:

THE POETRY OF THOM GUNN.

Unlike Heaney or Hill, Thom Gunn has chosen to base his work not on the geographical and emotional particularities of legend but the more neutral parameters of classical myth, setting its narratives against his developing experience as a kind of touchstone, still points on a turning world. Gunn's poetry is not an archeology of the past but a continuing quest for illumination - from the existential agonies of Fighting Terms to the alchemical fusions of Moly - in which myth is a means to an end; the roots of his native European culture, which Gunn rejects, are transplanted to structure new, alien experience - California, the holocaust, LSD - which Gunn now willingly embraces,

'Till waking one night I look up to see
new gods shining over me'¹.

Again, unlike Hill and Heaney, Gunn deals in clusters of ideas rather than images, philosophical enquiry rather than natural descriptions, constrained by a technical virtuosity which is heir to this classical tradition, conveying

'the smoothness, control and urbanity that we associate with classical writing ... most of those who have succeeded best in writing so, i.e. within restraints both technical and personal, have been people most tempted towards personal anarchy. For them there is some purpose in close limits, and there is something to restrain'².

This explains the extraordinary claustrophobia and tight control of Gunn's own early work - far more coherently than, say, Alan Bold's crass suggestion that

'a future definitive edition will be tightly bound in leather, with a buckle for a clasp, so that readers can appreciate in full its fetishistic character'³,

instead shaping into art an intense study of the poet's own personality and place in society, far removed in tact and lack of self-glorification from the later 'confessional' school while similarly elevating biography into revelation. This sense of classical tradition is more than just self-restraint, however, for through it the poet can place the contemporary in terms of the timeless, the particularities of the present in the context of the accumulated wisdom of the past,

'it is not merely a question of bringing Martial or Juvenal up to date, nor even of building up a national literature that can rival the classics, it is a matter of continuing the life and society that was behind the literature, evaluating, adapting, naturalizing it'⁴.

Gunn's earliest work reveals a precocious infatuation with classical myth, itself testimony to his father's assertion that 'Thom was better read at II⁵ than most people at 35' and dominated by a sub-Keatsian allusiveness,

'O peony you smell
like the heavenly nectar Hebe spilt
On luxurious Olympus',⁶

With similar incongruity, a descriptive poem on Eel Pie Island rapidly 'filled up with ivy-festooned statues of Greek gods and goddesses',⁷. The timeless and the mundane again interact in the two surviving fragments⁸ of Gunn's projected epic 'The Furies', its hero Ralph both self-projection - 'twenty years old with 'unusual intelligence' and a 'public school virginity' - and mythic hero, an Odysseus about to 'shortly start a journey not soon done', an Orestes whom 'Furies pursue in the steam of railway trains'. Here, however, the Furies are ultimately kindly, externalisations of 'the calm of his ideal' through which Ralph merges body and spirit (a crucial split in Gunn's early poetry) to

'Be one at last with hard and clumsy flesh
The double man will be the single man',⁹.

Gunn's attempts at heroic resonance - intricate stanzaic form, heightened diction, careful evocations of battle - fail through the immaturity of his raids on the Homeric style, metaphors which are crass rather than gravely classical -

'Like candy floss it melted on the tongue
Like fairy gold it turned to leaves and dung',¹⁰.

It is this very uncertainty which is most attractive: the incompleteness of love - 'there weighed more sadness than he knew to feel' - the obvious sexual base of Ralph's dream of monstrous battle, and the externalising here of the duality between human and animal, art and nature, which so oddly prefigures Moly,

'This brown and glossy man-turned strip of skin
Or those gray craning bristles tipped with white',¹¹.

Such Self-doubt, interpreted through classical myth, characterises many of those early poems felt too unclear - or revealing - for inclusion in Fighting Terms.

In 'Earthborn', the poet sinks back into earth, his own self, and is abducted

'Persephone like, past seams of gold and stone
To the plutonic darkness and the strength',¹².

to find 'unequivocal hope' in heroism, Ralph again, 'those whom talent sets apart

... the handsome, brave and wise'. 'Palinode' celebrates this heroism as a kind of doomed bravado in the face of a hostile and alien world (like Gunn as poet)

'Admirable like stubborn crippled men
The heroes use with energy what they have
As though it were not partial',¹³

but it is partial and such 'self love' is not enough, even Coriolanus proving
'most grand' when he 'threw his hoarded constancy to the winds' and allowed love
to overcome honour. In 'Terms' this conflict between heroic pride and the need
for love is internalised, the poet taking 'Prometheus-posture' until his lover
decides whether to destroy or join him - 'either push me from this iron boulder/
or spend the helpless aeons at my side',¹⁵. Gunn is already mastering the
technique of using classical imagery to illuminate the tangled problems of the
present, neurosis frozen(through art)into mythic narrative.

Gunn's first collection, Fighting Terms¹⁶, centres on the same need to escape
self-involvement in order to face reality, and the existential choice which this
involves, here expressed in either military or mythical imagery. It is on this
that critics have been most divided, some noting Gunn's 'gift for imagining
legend or for using narrative patterns, and not merely isolated images, symbol-
ically',¹⁷ while others found the same poems 'allegorically unconvincing',¹⁸.

Certainly Fighting Terms now seems a more mysterious and less direct collection
than its original reception¹⁹ suggested, a refocusing helped by Gunn's subsequent
revisions, most notably the replacement of 'Carnal Knowledge' with 'The Wound'
as opening poem and keynote, aggressive sexuality yielding to botched heroism.
Gunn has variously described this wound as 'the breakdown of control over one-
self',²⁰ and an 'unsuccessful attempt to assimilate primitive experience',²¹.
Certainly the poem is itself a myth, endlessly circular and inevitably tragic,
with the speaker's sense of hidden guilt brought into focus by the classical
narrative through which he had hoped to escape it - Patroclus, after all, died
in Achilles' armour sacrificing his own life to save his friend's honour. As in
'Terms', escape is impossible, the poet's only freedom his awareness of his own
imprisonment - 'once again/I had to let those storm-lit valleys heal',²². Therapy,
'I was myself, subject to no man's breath', has become self-destructive, and the
poet, confined to bed like Achilles to his tent, must start the whole slow process
again.

Similarly, the imagery of this mental imprisonment, most often expressed in terms of unending circularity, dominates Fighting Terms, just as possible escape is manifested only in dreams or mythic fictions. In 'Round and Round', the 'lighthouse keeper's world' reflects this circularity, forming, even when he temporarily escapes it, a 'huge totem' of daily routine,

'Within whose curve his thoughts still drift:
the stony skeleton of himself',²³,

a deadening repetition mirrored even by the stangaic form employed, in which the last line exactly repeats the first. The same device is used, less stringently, in 'Wind in the Street', where such hardened routine is not yet dominant - the poet can still escape the 'talking shop' to 'regain the struggle with an uncommitted air' (a pun due more to clumsiness than craft). Just as the external world represents freedom in 'Round and Round' - the waves also spin regularly, but break 'for their own endeavour's sake' - here 'a purposeful gust of wind tugs at my hair'. Elsewhere, Gunn uses not extended metaphor but moralised legend to express this sinister sense of pattern. In 'The Secret Sharer', for example, circularity is more closely allied to one of Gunn's most deep-rooted fears, the loss, or uncertainty, of identity expressed through the legend of the doppelganger. Here the street represents not freedom but negation, 'unconcerned as a dead eye', the wind turning 'in its groove' not purpose but alternating consciousness. The final, chilling ambiguity - 'I am not there' - could be spoken by either of the poem's two selves, the poet in bed (as in 'The Round') or the watcher in the street. Whichever applies, the poem is deeply unsettling, the wind's groove another form of circularity mirroring the poet's 'two equal fears', that either this doppelganger will ignore his other self, thus negating him, or acknowledge him, and thus prove this feared duality,

'What, I asked, if I never hear my call?
And what if it reaches my insensitive ears',²⁴.

In other poems this circularity is linked to individual human tragedy, the wheel of fortune. 'The Court Revolt' develops Aesop's fable - 'king stork was welcome to replace a log' - into an allegory of responsibility and power - 'see in his case/a problem which is problem to us all'. The paradox is that those

most fitted to good government are 'doomed' by their own virtue;

'Not that it is too much for flesh and bone

But flesh and bone are far too much for it,'²⁵.

'The Right Possessor' completes this almost Ruritanian narrative, from exile to return back to a once ravished country indifferent as its 'drifted deep' snow (as in 'The Secret Sharer' an image of exclusion). Whereas the king's earlier retreat, himself 'no longer child', was redeemed only by the help of 'orphaned boys', it is another boy, 'least suspected', who assassinates him on his return. Like the king's footprints in the snow, actions are 'obvious in a perfect round', a tragic stasis in which nothing is resolved - 'forward and backward now make equal sense' - until it is too late, the circle of fate has moved irreparably on, 'indecision and delay have lost/for ever what I always wanted most,'²⁶.

Both poems could be interpreted as allegories of forsaken love, 'one has learnt to make the sexual application,'²⁷, but it is their sense of doomed hope, a medieval sense of tragedy as predestined fall enshrined in legend, which most characterises them, and the collection as a whole. Indeed, sex is itself part of this endless circularity, 'you know, I know you know I know you know,'²⁸, and Gunn uses it to express his preoccupations, love as a mode of dominance.

Significantly, the most memorable (self-created) myth created in Fighting Terms is the image of the poet as heartless lover, soldier in a war in which sex is victory, tenderness defeat. Edmund is the heroic figure here, unfaithful, 'rough and lecherous' to the point of caricature,

'When it was over he pulled his trousers on,

'Demon lovers must go' he coldly said,'²⁹.

'Carnal Knowledge', which opened the original collection, presents this persona more fully, the poet as poseur performing the 'same comical act inside the tragic game' but not able, except in his dreams, to perceive his sexual partner as more than inferior in an animal act, 'cackle you hen and answer when I crow'. Such 'carnal knowledge' illuminates nothing but itself, and does nothing to break down the gulf between two warring individuals, 'I know of no emotion we can share'. As part of this self-created legend, love is inextricably linked with warfare (Gunn did two years National Service before going up to Cambridge),

'fighting terms' in which military and sexual strategy are intertwined - the 'impermanent treaty' of 'To His Cynical Mistress', projected invasion of 'the land complete' in 'The Beach Head', 'raising of a seige' in 'Captain in Time of Peace'. On closer examination, however, Gunn is seen to counteract his own myth - 'only expected harm/falls from a khaki man', but, as in 'Palinode', such doomed heroism, whether in love or war, is not enough, a lack of emotional commitment which these protagonists themselves realize. The speaker in 'Captain in Time of Peace' acknowledges the coarsening effects of war - once 'fit for peaceful living' he is now a 'clumsy brute in uniform' whose habit is 'to loot' - but his real need is 'honour in the town at peace', just as the adventurer in 'The Beach Head' seeks 'a pathway to the country's heart'. Even in the most uncompromising of these poems, 'Lofty in the Palais de Danse', the soldier's self-disgust is stressed, 'like the world, I've gone to bad', killing in himself 'the easy things that others like' in mourning for the death of his lover. The routine of seduction here seems as mechanical and circular as, say, 'Round and Round', and offers no real defence against memories of genuine love,

'The pictures are unwilling that I see bob
Out of the dark, and you can't turn them out'³⁰.

Sex is another form of circularity, forced imprisonment, the desire in 'La Prisonniere' to 'shut you in a box' until safely reduced to a 'heap of bones' which can be possessed completely, the loss of freedom in 'Tamer and Hawk' which turns love back into war, tamer into prey. The waking dream of 'Without a Counterpart' in which the poet is 'chained' in a threatening landscape seems to resolve itself through love - the magical formula of speaking the loved one's name breaks the spell - but freedom is not granted, 'your arms still chained me as you fell asleep'. The remaining poems in Fighting Terms use classical or Christian myth, as opposed to legend and Gunn's own myth-making ability, to express both this imprisonment and, tentatively, the possibility of escape.

'Helen's Rape' returns to the Trojan war and contrasts the gifts of the gods, 'the violent dreamed escape' with man's reaction, 'to prevaricate and disguise'. Helen can abandon her homeland but not her mortality and the

warfare which her seduction sets in motion, sex and battle again interlinked in unending conflict. The heroic age comes to an end with this 'last authentic rape', an irrecoverable touchstone for a world which can only 'multiply and vulgarise', the abduction of Helen brutalised into the rape of the Sabine women. Myth withdraws to an area of moral absolutes denied to fallible man, the villagers who 'gape humbly' in 'Here Come the Saints' at the heroes³¹, 'innocent' mysterious, summoned by the 'cock crow' of Peter's apostasy into the 'terrible dark wood' of self-sacrifice. The stasis of 'moonlight snow', two dominant images for frozen inaction in the collection, is disrupted through 'abrupt and violent motions', but such determination is beyond the villagers or, indeed, the botched resurrection in 'Lazarus not Raised'. A variant of the biblical myth, Christ is here unable to bring Lazarus back from the dead because he has never properly been alive; from 'childhood fields imaginary and safe' he refused the 'nag of offered grace' for 'rest' itself much like the 'trivial territory of death'. It is the very ferocity of Christ, that 'terrified awakening glare', which makes Lazarus choose 'to stay dead', imprisoned in the repetition mirrored in the modulating final line of each stanza.

If myth evokes this imprisonment, it also provides hope, all the more poignant for being so fleeting, of some kind of escape, a heaven - vision or mirage - to set against the 'hell of love' evoked in 'Inside the moon'³², lovers 'locked in each other's arms', consumed in a 'still fog' of exhausted entropy. Conversely, 'Contemplative and Active'³³ traces an escape route from the 'cerebral world' to the mist where 'unknowable human fragments move'; 'it may be I only wanted air'. 'For a Birthday' also describes a voyage away from language and barren intellect, renouncing 'agnostic irony' for the religion of love, a real communion not of bread and wine but sexual belonging,

'The sweet moist wafer of your tongue I taste,
And find right meanings in your silent mouth'³⁴.

This search for Eden has, of course, its own dangers. 'Looking Glass', the most metaphysical poem in a collection which owes much to Donne and Marvell,³⁵ presents Eden as a mirage, a fantasy which makes the speaker oblivious of his true position, passing 'from town to town, damp-booted, unemployed'. He holds

onto his memories, 'charmed-still for ever at one stage of growing', as if a (literal) Eden which he, as gardener, allows slowly to decay, its 'green towers' sweetly going 'to seed'. This dream, however, is just another prison, 'not innocence/but a fine callous fickleness', a self-indulgent fantasy which blinds him to his own decay, mirrored in this 'looking glass'. Heaven cannot exist without a counter-balancing hell, a paradox central to 'A Mirror for Poets', in which art again reflects life, imagination refracting the real world. In a virtuoso reconstruction of the Elizabethan age seen as a modern fascist state - in which even poets are subject to censorship and torture - Eden is, nevertheless, achieved, through art, as 'Arcadia, a fruitful permanent land', located where 'the boundaries met/of life and life, at danger'. Through poetry, both in the 'flail of comedy' and the classical 'pity' and 'terror' of tragedy, mankind can 'behold its whole extent', and it is therefore the duty of poets, now and then, to locate these 'Forms', the guiding myths behind everyday events (shadows on Plato's cave), as seen earlier in Gunn's definition of the classical tradition,

'In street, in tavern, happening would cry
'I am myself but part of something greater',³⁶.

This finding of hope even in despair illuminates others of the more far-looking poems in Fighting Terms, an escape route from the self-involved melancholy of Gunn's adolescent work. In 'A Kind of Ethics', 'unregenerate' animals breed from the 'foul confusion' of dead trees, proving that 'out of a possibly bad may come/an undeniable good'. These 'sharp-toothed young' derive vitality from the 'simple religion' of growth and decay, an energy (pagan rather than classical) which escapes imprisonment, and it is in such (albeit brutal) innocence that Eden resides. Similarly 'Lerici' contrasts Shelley - a mere 'minor conquest' of death because (like Lazurus) submissive, 'arms at his side'-unfavourably with Byron - 'arms open wide', masterful even in death and well 'worth the sea's pursuit'. By escaping stasis or imprisonment through their very vitality, the 'great expense of muscle and breath', such explorers of human limits proclaim human defiance, profligate of life as of money,

'Dignify death by thriftless violence -
Squandering all their little left to spend',³⁷.

Escape is made complete in the concluding poem, 'Incident on a Journey'. The red-coat soldier's 'unnatural strength', 'squandered' like Byron's, and his lack of 'plausible nostalgia' defy the imprisonment of routine through sheer will (or wilfulness). The poem echoes, and resolves, the major motifs of the collection - soldier as vital hero, art that can illuminate 'humanity beyond its span', the dream that brings escape and meaning, the unhealed wound - but the 'storm-lit valleys' of the opening poem are now externalised and 'light' with the promise of a new dawn. The forceful poses of the Iliad - 'The Wound', 'Helen's Rape' - in which warfare is a true arbiter of courage and moral worth now lead into the poet's own Odyssey, a search for his lost homeland - it was at this point that Gunn moved permanently from England to America. 'Incident on a Journey', like Fighting Terms itself, is the starting point for a journey into meaning in which 'I would regret nothing'.³⁸

Gunn's second collection, The Sense of Movement³⁹, continues this progress into meaning, having established the 'terms' of this conflict, now developed from mythic abstractions to existential certainties. Terry Eagleton has seen this existentialism as itself a myth system through which Gunn is able to breathe life into metaphysics, relate personal history to 'an underlying ontology', for

'Sartrian myth did allow a limited kind of transaction to take place between the variable texture of experience and a framing vision'.⁴⁰

This transaction is, however, essentially negative (and therefore not true myth) for it separates further exactly those opposites which it tried to join,

'centred on a nameless néant which intervened between a watchful consciousness aware of its large general meanings, and the swarming bits of specific reality within which it moved'.⁴¹

This seems unnecessarily complex, confusing as well as confused, for Gunn uses existentialism as part of his search for points of contact between these dualities - art and life, man and nature, the abstract and the everyday - apparent opposites which are later to be brought together through a more fulfilling (and genuine) kind of myth - after Gunn has pursued his odyssey through the badlands of age and sexuality. Certainly as products of the much vaunted 'Movement',⁴² these poems are wolves in Larkin's clothing, carefully constructed machines that suddenly reveal real blood.

If Fighting Terms was so entitled to unite body and spirit, aggression and its verbal expression, so The Sense of Movement is equally precisely named, not just motion - whether along a corridor, into marshland or through fog - but its intellectual motivation, both sensation and rationale. In Fighting Terms movement was both dangerous - breaking open the wound when 'rage ... flew to my head', the saints processing into the 'terrible dark wood', the assassination of the 'right possessor' on his return home - and yet fulfilling - the progress of love from a 'beach head', the climb to meaning in 'For a Birthday', willed release,

'I was alive and felt my body sweet,
Uncaked blood in all its channels flowing'⁴³.

The opening poem here, suitably entitled 'On the Move', takes up this imagery, turning a Beat cliché, 'man you gotta go', into a metaphor of such escape. The centre of the poem is not blue jay or cycle gang but 'one', the poet as unsure observer (although the gang also strap in doubt, 'by hiding it, robust'). Seeking the instinct or poise of Nature, the 'wheeling swallows', he expresses the impediments to such clarity in terms which beautifully modulate into a description of the approaching gang, similarly unsure -

'One moves with an uncertain violence
Under the dust thrown by a baffled sense
Or the dull thunder of approximate words'⁴⁴.

Such hardness 'has no shape yet', still 'imperfectly' controlled, but this 'part solution' is a start, at least, to understanding a world without apparent meaning - 'one wakes/afloat on movement that divides and breaks' - for just to choose movement is a redeeming existential choice, a commitment to the future.

'One joins the movement in a valueless world,
Choosing it, till, both hurler and the hurled,
One moves as well, always toward, toward'⁴⁵.

The poet can only half control his destiny, 'hurler and hurled', but at least the motorcyclists, whether real or metaphorical, escape such easy categorisations. They 'burst away', their very incompleteness human, abandoning 'known whereabouts',

'At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
One is always nearer by not keeping still'⁴⁶.

Impersonality manufactures a soul, 'the self-defined, astride the created will'. and this sets man apart from the 'scuffling' jay, the flies 'hanging in heat'.

Gunn defines this quest for meaning through a kind of advanced hero-worship (the same process, more successfully applied, as in 'The Wound'), taking figures from myth and legend as exemplars of moral worth - or negation - metaphors for self-awareness. 'Lines for a Book' shows this method at its worst, praising 'overdogs' like Alexander, teaching us 'to be insensitive, to steel the will', over (supposedly) self-regarding intellectuals like Stephen Spender, for

'... though the mind has also got a place
Its not in marvelling at its mirrored face',⁴⁷.

This Audenesque squib, a boy-scout call to action, is deeply unpleasant, both in its choice of metaphor, sitting 'all day at stool/inside the heart', and its lack of humanity, refusing 'pity which he cannot use', but its exaggerated spleen is surely comic - such anti-intellectualism is, after all, still a poem. 'Lines for a book'. 'Disturbing images' are far better evoked in 'A Plan of Self Subjection' where Alexander is a more problematical hero, the poet much less sure of himself. The circularity of much of Fighting Terms returns but here it is self-imposed rather than forced by routine, planned rather than casual. The poet, a mere 'fragment of weak flesh', circles (like the medieval world) between heaven and hell, his poetry circles between cause and expression - imposing 'form upon my fault described/so that my fault is worse' - and even his identity circles between hero-worship and self-disgust, the one infecting the other,

'Each tainted with the other
Becomes diseased, both self and self's ideal',⁴⁸.

Even love involves similar flux, constantly 'changing sides', but all three, art, self-regard and sex, can bring balance - shade from sun and hell - and freedom, 'tracing circles is a useful spell/against contentment'. Gunn admires Alexander, Mark Antony and Coriolanus - 'perfect king ... lover ... stoic' - but 'however much I may aspire/I stay myself'. 'Birthday Poem' is similarly unsure. The opposites drawn in 'Lines for a Book', Adolphe and Fabrice⁴⁹, the 'speculative man or passionate', are both assimilated in the search for the 'Golden Fleece' but this modern Jason cannot emulate classical myth; he remains, again like Adolphe and Fabrice, 'prisoned in perplexity', a parasite on his own sense of discontent. Apparent victory, in both quest and sex, turns into

self-imposed defeat, the 'attractive bait' has proved just that - lack of ties with stray mermaids is not freedom but loneliness - and this new Jason must, to

'Ponces and whores, concede, because intent
On groping round your own bewilderment',⁵⁰.

The subject here is - as in the earlier 'For a Birthday' - surely the poet himself, assessing his own failure in the light of passing time, a kind of self-addressed birthday card (the poetry here is certainly a good example of Gunn's first achieved style, thought brilliantly parcelled into stanza and rigorously rhymed iambics, sense compressed almost to suffocation, metaphor and moral seamlessly joined). Classical myth is here used to point the moral, the tragic discontinuity between genuine heroism and self-regarding success, the first unattainable, the second 'omniscient' but ultimately empty.

Elsewhere in The Sense of Movement Gunn turns myth into a kind of diagnosis, an impartial judge of present - and past - frailties. 'The Wheel of Fortune', for example, develops the idea in 'Lines for a Book' that 'their pride exalted some, some overthrew' into another circle, a process (central to medieval tragedy,⁵¹ to which the references allude) in which good fortune inevitably converts to bad. Dreams of mutability turn into truth, bishop ruined, lover exposed, Lambert Simnel's pretence to the throne ending in the kitchen where he he stirs not his own porridge as king but that of his new master, the 'under footman'. Such circularity is both feared and respected - 'O perfect Wheel' - because it is neither avoidable nor respecter of class; monarchs and kitchen boys are together 'strapped helpless'. Resistance is merely poignant - in 'The Silver Age' the centurion bitterly resists the change from military to Christian values, 'hard with the indignation of the lover', yet this remnant of 'true Rome', both 'earthpale' and at home in the dark, is similarly doomed,

'What made this one fragment of a sunken coast
Remain, far out, to be beaten by the moonlight?',⁵²

'Julian the Apostate' returns to the 'simpler dark' mastered by the centurion - who moved through it as if a 'river/sullen with mud' - but here it is an Emperor who attempts to resist the change from paganism to Christianity where, in the previous poem, the Emperor prefigured such anti-militarism: . Julian

finds 'the absolute is hard to formulate - the 'sudden wrong' of his own 'deliberate laws', the slaughter of the pagans - so exceeds his own position, bursting the 'doubly sacred fold' even though he knows the symbolic worth of such ritual, 'rule lay in gathered fold'. Julian, unlike 'licitor or heavy slave', is 'apostate' and thus an example to modern man, devoting his 'cold resolve'

'To fix a question that, eluding name,
To make corporeal would be to solve',⁵³

and so breaking the 'hypothetical frame' which binds him, the burden of thought. Grammar resolves, appropriately, this linguistic despair, the 'question mark' of such doubts yielding to the 'exclamation mark' of pure will. Julian welcomes his own assassination as the only simplicity left, an 'outrage of the simpler dark'.

The Christian myths resisted in these last two poems themselves are used by Gunn to explore the same problems, exemplars from the past. 'Jesus and his Mother' is based on a central paradox, Christ's saying 'I am my own and not my own', both man and Son of God. Mary is hurt by this apparent split in loyalties, 'my only son, more God's than mine', and what seem to be signs of alienation - Jesus's sullenness, his independence 'like an arrogant wind blown/where he may please', the 'strange shadow' he now throws. As in 'On the Move', the choice is between domesticity and action, the tears of age - 'lazy syrup', 'a modest and contented shine' - and the tears of grief - the pears here are, after all, those of Gethsemane. Jesus is about to go off to fulfil his death, his destiny, leaving a life measured 'in week and week' for the dark, an 'outcry in the town', Mary's response is only human, an understandable call to what cannot be understood,

'I cannot reach to call you Lord,
Answer me as my only son',⁵⁴

'St Martin and the Beggar' follows this with a more approachable kind of self-sacrifice, more human than divine, thought again subservient to action. Saint Martin exchanges his studies - 'the principles of Christian life', the peg of a 'religious nail' - for the real world of battle and night, 'a ship that moves on darkness' (dark, again, as an expression of doubt). Confronted by the needy beggar Martin divides his cloak in half, neither turning away or conscious of his own good, and it is this which Jesus recognises as true humanity,

'But you, being a saint of men
Gave only what you could'⁵⁵.

Cloaks are 'needless weight', the moral abstractions drawn from them being what matters, and Martin finds, through action, the religious teaching that he first sought, food for thought - 'pondering on the matter/St Martin bent and ate'. If myth can be turned to provide such complex modern moralities, ranging from the deliberately simple, almost Sunday school, narration of this last poem to the highly literary allusiveness of 'Birthday Poem', then so can legend, and it is to this that Gunn turns elsewhere in The Sense of Movement.

'At the Back of the North Wind', for example, locates a fantasy land⁵⁶, (derived from a classic children's novel of the same title) though one not of escapism but death, an 'air which kept no season: denying change', a sad immortality which negates life -

'It nipped the memory numb, scalding away
The castle of winter and the smell of hay'⁵⁷.

This hay, in which the boy hides to escape winter and to dream his fantasies, represents innocence - 'all summer's warmth' - later subverted by the 'other smells' of experience - 'fresh sweat and sweet mortality' - prefigured in the boy's legend. Similarly North wind yields to East, life to oblivion which 'swept the mews dead clean from wisps of hay', the remnants of human comfort. Legend again appears in 'Puss in Boots to the Giant', drawing out the sinister implications of children's nursery rhymes into a kind of fascistic rationale of pure will, the obverse of the attitudes praised in 'Lines for a Book'. The legendary world here derives from Yeats' Byzantium - 'that is no country for old men. The young in one another's arms'⁵⁸ - emphasising its heartlessness,

'So praise the pitiless, hot
In each other's arms'⁵⁹.

and unfettered sexuality, 'after sun set/Jack has his Jill'. Action, enjoying 'two triumphs in one place', is again seen as preferable to thought, the refuge of 'gigglers, gossips ... Itching Palms' and failures - 'lean highway beggars' - are banished from these 'fields green as wide'. In fact, the whole 'fine simplicity' is a mirage, this land a fiction invented by Puss to confuse and thus destroy the Giant⁶⁰, another fantasy world, like the back of the North

Wind which presages only death - as circular a maze as the poem itself, the final stanza repeating the first, and so into infinity.

'The Allegory of the Wolf Boy' presents a similar deception, 'sad duplicity'⁶¹ here given representative and oddly solemn force through the werewolf legend, man merged into beast. Civilized gentility - tennis, 'tea upon the gentle lawn' - is set against animal instinct - 'insect lust' - an impasse resolved by moonlight

'Which, with the touch of its infertile light
Shall loose desires hoarded against his will'⁶².

Darkness yields to myth, as in 'The Silver Age', but such magic is a cruel master, this 'clean exception to the natural laws' bringing both tyranny - the wolf boy 'bound to the moon' - and a botched metamorphosis - 'yet he has bleeding paws'. As with the stable lad, or indeed St Martin, adolescent uncertainty is elevated to fable, failure enshrined as a kind of tentative morality, and this is extended to a more contemporary myth, pop star as modern god, in 'Elvis Presley'. The limitations of the medium, 'hackneyed words in hackneyed songs', are paradoxically used to convey a freedom, an impulse prolonged through art into 'a habit of the times'. Presley represents a generation, 'our idiosyncrasy and our likeness', and it is his myth, not his real self, that is important, turning 'revolt into a style'⁶³, his stance (like the guitar he wields) 'posture for combat'. If Presley is a god, uniting revolt and violence, then the modern city is a goddess, both lover and whore. 'In Praise of Cities' presents a succession of tender double-entendres, townscape and mistress, this goddess worshipped because 'extreme; material, and the work of man' and thus really a divinity of self,

'You welcome in her what remains of you;
And what is strange and what is incomplete
Compels a passion without understanding
For all you cannot be'⁶⁴.

The city releases a welcome sensuality not seen in Gunn's work before, along with a looseness of technique to be developed further in Touch, and this anthropomorphic treatment - the city 'buxom in disorder', 'casual yet urgent in her love making', wandering 'lewdly', presenting 'cosmetic light' and 'hard ornaments' - is truly extraordinary, a metamorphosis from concrete into flesh, from goddess of the streets into lover, a 'desire that never ends/familiar and inexplicable'.

If legend here seems to touch the supernatural - 'out of a mist the river turns to see/whether you follow still' - this sense of an otherness, either watching or watched, is evoked elsewhere in the collection. 'The Separation', itself based on a ghost story⁶⁵, treats language as a form of distance that parts Gunn from his lover, Quint from the governess, lust from its fulfillment;

'The trampled meadow of words yet intervene,
To part desire from the tall muscle of love'⁶⁶.

This separation could equally be an internal one between thought and emotion - 'you prowl in the garden and I am here' strongly recalls the doppelgangers of 'The Secret Sharer' - the poet haunted by the ghosts of lost love, 'what dead charge do I pull upon my breast'. 'The Corridor' attempts to resolve this divide between 'the thought and felt', first through the apparent mastery of voyeurism - 'pleasure was simple thus' - but eventually by seeing that he is watched too,

'For if the the watcher of the watcher shown
There in the distant glass, should be watched too,
Who can be master, free of others; who
Can look around and say he is alone'⁶⁷.

The resolution here, acceptance of this mysterious other, prefigures the end of 'Misanthropos', reaching community - 'holding these eyes as equal in his eyes' - through a new sense of communion - going 'one hand held out, to meet a friend'. This is not yet achieved, these 'curious eyes' not seen direct but reflected in a pierglass, watching like 'a picture in a book', and yet the possibility is offered, as it is again in 'Vox Humana'. Here this ghost itself talks (in the syllabics which are to free Gunn's later works), nearest when 'you have least resistance', its recognition - and naming - enough to confer mastery, 'for you command/in naming me you prefer'. This 'Vox Humana', the spirit of humanity, is seen as the motivating force behind history, and the myths it presents - Socrates' suicide which protects his honour, Alexander's certainty of conquest and, in contrast, Brutus's rejection of it, subverting this 'indefinite haze' as the ghost of Caesar whom he murdered, and thus prefiguring defeat at Philippi. For those with more courage, this definition of self through existential will can turn thought into action, doubt into certainty, for it brings

'to what you define now, all
there is, ever, of future'⁶⁸.

This belief in the existential will, the 'Sartrian myth' discussed earlier, is indeed the underlying myth-system of Gunn's early work, albeit often expressed in classical heroism, moralised legend. Martin Dodsworth has perceptively traced the mastering conflict in Gunn's poetry between stillness and motion to Heidegger's similar dichotomy between 'inertia' and 'projection',⁶⁹. This division is most clearly expressed, in the guise of Arthurian legend, in 'Merlin in the Cave: He Speculates without a Book'. Merlin is imprisoned in 'inertia', held by 'the arms of lust' and yet failing at love because his 'philosophic appetite' would 'let no fault intrude'. It was his loss of the 'instinct' of movement, 'clouds, and separate rooks/blown back on their flight', which imprisoned Merlin first in senility, 'with aphrodisiac/I brought back vigour', and finally the spell of Vivien, transfixed in stone,

'The Rock. The space, too narrow for a hand.

Pressing my head between two slopes of stone',⁷⁰.

Merlin decides therefore to attempt 'projection', growing 'back through knowledge' to direct contact with experience - 'I find the earth is suddenly black and near'— watching 'the flux I never guessed' and using this new emptiness, both of cave and brain, to copy not lust but 'the sweet promiscuity of the bee'. He wills to escape the 'emblems' of the mind for a genuine Yeatsian synthesis, a new quest through the cave of self, to unite action and movement, the instinct of the rook and the promiscuity of the bee,

'..... But I must act, and make
The meaning in each movement that I take.

Rook, bee, you are the whole and not a part',⁷¹.

The poem's apparent circularity, so common with Gunn, is illusory and revealed by a subtle pun - conclusion has become purpose, however turned to once again - 'this is an end, and yet another start'. Again, the 'risk' involved in crossing
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from 'inertia' to 'projection', first described by Kirkegaard, forms the subject of a poem like 'The Nature of an Action'. The poet steps from the imprisonment of the 'cluttered square of fact', a 'clumsy fond contact' rejected for a 'twenty year' journey along the corridor (again) of self, restrained by the gestures of habit. 'Directed by the compass of my heart', the poet at last discovers the 'simple handle' of the will to enter a room just as suffocating, just as immobile-

circularity is only circumvented by existential freedom, the will to act -

'Much like the first, this room in which I went.

Only my being there is different',⁷³.

It is Sartre's existentialism which has proved most influential on Gunn, however - the poet ironically acknowledges that the ideas behind 'On the Move' 'were lifted from Sartre's lecture 'L'Existentialisme est un humanisme'',⁷⁴, while a later poem brilliantly analyses 'La Nausée', the sliminess of self,

'Nausea fills me, and the only essence

Is my tangible illegal presence',⁷⁵.

Gunn has taken most from Sartre's purest statement of atheistic existentialism, 'L'être et le néant'⁷⁶ (although the philosopher himself has long moved away towards Marxism in works like 'Critique de la raison dialectique'⁷⁷) both directly - 'The Corridor' is taken direct from a metaphor for 'L'existence d'autrui' in the chapter 'Le Regard',⁷⁸ - and as a pervading influence. Sartre's strange, almost mechanical, use of modern city life to provide philosophical abstractions,⁷⁹ his sexuality⁸⁰, his very terminology as well as his precise sense of form are all taken over in Gunn's work as a kind of myth, an explanation of reality. Sartre's division between human consciousness, the 'for-itself', struggling to attain freedom through the exercise of will and the dense solidify of the material world, the 'in-itself', directly inspires a poem like 'The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of his Death', unsettled both from machine and life. The motorcyclist follows his will - 'I am being what I please' - thus warring with the natural world which lacks such consciousness, 'for itself' against 'in itself',

'My human will cannot submit

To nature, though brought out of it',⁸¹.

He urges his 'chosen instrument' against the marsh, continuing his stance even in death, his heel 'pressing deep/accelerates the waiting sleep', this willed movement continuing to where 'death and life in one combine'. The horror is that marsh plants archetypally 'in themselves', 'slow without patience' - swell out the corpse's clothes and 'feign this dummy is a man again', a gross simulacrum which has lost its 'for itselfness', its sense of will. The plants move 'without volition', converting man's 'special richness' into dirt, flesh into loam,

'All that they get they get by chance.

And multiply in ignorance',⁸².

The real horror here is the loss not of life but consciousness, subsumed in earth. Sartre, however, makes a further distinction, the 'for-itself' developing into the 'being-for-others', a transition half completed in the processes of sadism,

'There is then indeed an incarnation through pain. But at the same time the pain is procured by means of instruments ... plunging this freedom into flesh without ceasing to be the one who provokes'⁸³.

This is echoed in Gunn's poem 'The Beaters', love created out of its apparent antithesis, 'none but my foe to be my guide'. Such instruments are 'emblems to recall identity', 'violent parables' which exist between intent and action, 'the raised arm and the fallen thud'. This is a deeply shocking poem, and Gunn certainly does not condone such sadism: he instead emphasises both its sad incompleteness and yet its reaching for true communion, gentleness evoked from pain.

'The lips that meet the wound can finally
Justify nothing - neither pain nor care;
Tender upon the shoulders ripe with blood'⁸⁴.

Of course, it could be argued that these poems would be just as effective without a knowledge of the philosophy which underlies them. Gunn's vocabulary is drenched with Sartrean terms - 'choice', 'will', 'freedom', 'anguish', 'absurd' and 'nothingness' - but these function outside the system which has appropriated them. Indeed a poem like 'The Annihilation of Nothing', which does rely on a knowledge of existentialism, is largely impenetrable because it lacks this further dimension. Nevertheless, existentialism lacks the resonance of true myth, most obviously because it lacks a narrative structure - which the savour of this special terminology does not replace - and thus needs other fictions to express it, thus making the poetry arcane and hermetic. Taking over Sartre's metaphors - parables almost - will not do, they are not common property. Existentialism is of crucial importance in Gunn's early work, but as part of a wider myth,

'Perhaps it is right, therefore, to regard Being and Nothingness as the 85
culmination of a mood - anti-rational, anti-scientific and anti-political

Gunn defined his own position, in 1957, in startlingly similar terms,

'I don't deliberately belong to any school, but I suppose I am part of the National Service Generation and have a few of its characteristics, i.e. lack of concern with religion, lack of class, a rather undirected impatience'⁸⁶.

It is this definition of self, Gunn's real dominating myth, which structures The Sense of Movement - it is no accident that Gunn has chosen, in publicity photographs, to don black leather and motorcycle boots⁸⁷, nor that his avowed hobby is body-building⁸⁸. Using, again, existential terminology, 'Human Condition' isolates the poet, cut off in dense fog, 'condemned to be an individual'. From this 'mere/pinpoint of consciousness' Gunn wills himself to discover the limits (as did Elvis Presley) of self and the outside world, 'mind and universe', in order to then go beyond them, Merlin once more breaking free of his cave,

'I seek, to break, my span.
I am my one touchstone'⁸⁹.

It is this test which 'makes me man', the bravery of facing that one is 'born to fog, to waste' and yet still somehow retaining freedom. Gunn celebrates this same quality in his friends, hero-worship again elevated into legend. 'To Ivor Winters, 1955' celebrates Gunn's mentor⁹⁰ for the rigour with which he trains both dogs and language, for words 'compose the self' and 'with slow defining influence/stay to mark out our chosen lineaments'. Such self-control is precarious, total black 'implicit in the grey', but Winters contests the gathering darkness through a balance of 'Rule and Energy'⁹¹, 'tough in will' and thus a force of excellence in a world in which men are forced to exist

'In a half-world, not ours nor history's,
And learn the false from half-true premises'⁹².

This near-Augustan gravity continues into 'The Inherited Estate', a Jamesian 'American in Europe' inheriting both estate and, by implication, culture which decadence has allowed to crumble, 'typical products of intelligence/that lacks brute purpose'. Kitay shares Winters' 'calm discrimination', distinguishing what is valuable, what mere facade. These 'droppings of fashion' have succumbed to nature and the 'fat dark drift' of decay, but this new growth also presages fertility, Kitay paralleled by the 'one small seed' whose branches so confidently lift 'above failures' and whose bark he will engrave, symbolically

'With all the old virtues, young in fibre, names
That swell with time and tree, no dreams,
No ornaments, but tallies for your work'⁹³.

It is on such rigour that civilization is based, the sacrifice of self for duty.

This philosophical rigour is applied, equally stringently, to the mechanics of sex, using others to define the myth of self. The young hoodlum in 'Market at Turk',⁹⁴ 'gestates' future action with a kind of military preparedness, buckling himself in with both leather and 'reminders of the will' (though doubtless not learnt from Winters or Kitay, who this unwitting existentialist would more likely stab for their spare cash!) Sex and violence coalesce in a tension only released in 'close commotion of bar or bed', an ambiguity fueled by the final image, the hidden knife an emblem of virility, where this surrogate Gunn 'not yet knowing his purpose fully ... fingers the blade'. Compounding such unpleasant masculinity, love is still seen as an excrescence, a kind of prison - like Merlin immured by Vivien - well avoided by Gunn's heroic toughs. They conjoin instead aggression and sexuality (the mechanics of rape), the object of desire still merely an object. In 'High Fidelity', the abandoned lover, fury substituted for passion, returns to the prison of circularity, ducking love 'as a witch to sink or swim'. He thus resembles a gramophone needle, endlessly circling the blank inner grooves of a record (a superb modern metaphysical image).

'Surrounded in that played-out pose of age
By notes he was, but cannot be again',⁹⁵.

'First Meeting with a Possible Mother-in-Law' locates love as a battle for⁹⁶ possession, mother and lover learning 'the other's terms of banishment' through the 'bright material hint', both of cloth and metaphysics, not sufficiently hidden. In 'During an Absence', obstacles to fulfillment recur in new ways, for 'each love defines its proper obstacles', this Romeo and Juliet separated not by warring families but distance, 'we for whom time draws out, visas expire', for

'... under a self-generated glare
Any bad end has possibility',⁹⁷.

Inaction and the suffocation of desire are again evoked, once more in terms of literature, in 'Autumn Chapter in a Novel',⁹⁸. The poacher, 'a dead mouse gripped between his sensitive fingers' represents a natural forcefulness beyond the lovers, unable to escape 'the motions of their discontent', sewing and teaching -

'The leaves he scatters thus will settle back
In much the same position as they rose',⁹⁹,
leaves like the 'growing weightless mound' of the 'words they uttered' finally

'thrust violently upon the pane'. The narrator of 'Legal Reform' actually revels in such restraint, 'condemned to life', but seems partly to transcend it,

'... this time love is not the paradox
By which, whatever it contains, my cell
contains the absolute, because it locks',¹⁰⁰.

The death penalty is commuted to life (a pun which the poet works to its limits), past isolation - 'painful and lonely in the walks of death' - to present love - 'the cage of breath' - and such imprisonment, 'condemned to shift in your enclosing eyes', is restrictive only to 'the innocent, or fetter-maimed'. In direct contrast to 'The Beaters', desire has 'no use for his whip' for such love is unforced, the 'law is in our hands', 'passed by ourselves', and yet

'Not till I stopped the theft of all I saw
Just for the having's sake, could it be passed',¹⁰¹.

With this poem, Gunn prepares the way for his more mature work, accepting the imprisonment he once feared, and thus discovering freedom.

For all of its professed concern with movement and action, The Sense of Movement is really more an exploration of stasis and failure - even as 'tough' a poem as 'Lines for a Book' is circular in form, its last line repeating the first, and essentially undeveloped - and, as Dodsworth has so perceptively shown, 'written in the void'. (although where these poems remain 'in the empty realm of I02 fantasy, others, especially later ones, set off for our own, populated country'). The action is most completely frozen in 'Before the Carnival', again through art, movement reduced to the cold universality of the eternal, although moral division is retained. A contrast is pointed between the miser, a 'sexual gossip with a doll-like pout', a 'smocked pretender' who knows that he is 'fragment of a dream', and the two brothers whose own performance is yet to begin, as yet too active or too young for 'cloak or fur of heavy thought'. The major contrast, however, is between the two adults, in whom the 'lava flow of chance/overtook habit', turning them into their role of acrobat or guitarist, and the boy, yet to make his choice, an existential commitment to an activity which will define him -

'Shall it be then a simple rung of strength
Or these with many strings where well-trained skill
May touch one while it keeps the others still',¹⁰³.

All three 'scan/the pace of silence', permanently caught in their incompleteness,

imprisoned in art. Like the 'cold pastoral' of Keats' Grecian urn, which 'dost tease us out of thought',¹⁰⁴ Carl Timmer's painting catches the 'pace of silence' and thus permanently suspends time, both its ravages and its gifts, 'robes of bright scarlet, horns that were never blown'.

In such poetry, as brilliantly constructed as anything written since the war, Gunn achieves that balance described earlier¹⁰⁵ as the first heritage of the classical tradition, myth as formaldehyde (and hidebound form), 'the smoothness, control and urbanity that we associate with classical writing'. Nevertheless, the 'restraints both technical and personal', the overriding sense of imprisonment and circularity which such clarity requires, enervates the verse in the very process of constructing it. It is this double perspective that makes The Sense of Movement at once so impressive and yet frustrating an achievement. Gunn had yet to master classical myth as a way of 'continuing the life and society that was behind the literature'; this was only to come when he abandoned the essentially self-centred philosophy of existentialism for a more embracing myth, self-definition for a sense of community, the detached onlooker for the motorcycle gang, intellect for instinct.

My Sad Captains¹⁰⁵ marks this point of transition. Part one draws the concerns of The Sense of Movement to their purest expression, part two neatly sidesteps them for a new syllabic simplicity, the 'evaluating, adapting, naturalising' of the classical tradition at its most challenging. Critical debate has since centred on whether this new style is a development of, or a falling away from, Gunn's early virtuosity, 'the flatness of the new manner',¹⁰⁷ or a 'new clarity of theme and style'.¹⁰⁸ Certainly Gunn matched 'tough and troubled themes' with metres that were 'elegant, even classical in their praise'.¹⁰⁹ Frank Kermode saw Gunn as thus escaping the 'old myths and fictive lacks' that imprisoned his early work to move 'into real space' and a more masterful kind of myth-making, going about 'his possible and proper business of arranging words to reveal a world'.¹¹⁰ If My Sad Captains is, in itself, Gunn's slightest collection so far, it is also the most important in terms of his general development, from 'the act a slave to limit' to a 'limiting candour' itself 'part of the ultimate richness'.

Where The Sense of Movement took a delight in the will as absolute - its epigraph the confident 'je le suis, je veux l'être'^{III} - part I of My Sad Captains is less self-assured; will may be infinite and desire boundless, but the 'execution' is 'confined'^{II2}, the old myths no longer potent. 'The Book of the Dead' turns the revelations of classical myth - Tiresias summoned back, 'heavy as they' from the dead - into empty prophecy. Oblivion is contrasted with the uncertainty of life, Tiresias's unintended message not 'comfort', a 'last action ... ground for hope', but his own failure, for the clamorous dead

'Desire what they can never bring about;

The living bring discriminate gifts of blood'^{II4}.

The culmination of the odyssey is seen as essentially circular - Odysseus must still regain Ithaca only to then set off for another journey (presumably to his own death^{II5}), just as wheat has to be prepared - 'you must grind, bake, eat' - and the whole process of harvesting repeated, with no guarantee, in either case,

'That it will be, this time, either easier work

Or more successful. Even, perhaps, more hard'^{II6}.

Nevertheless, Odysseus 'turned back', from the temporarily resurrected Tiresias to his soldiers 'poor, drained of cunning', precisely because he 'knew the lack'. This very absence of comfort is part of being alive. Legend, like myth, here provides not archetypes of the will but examples of failure, defeat borne gracefully. 'From the Highest Camp' presents the Yeti, 'born of rejection, of the boundless snow', and found only in a 'bright region' in which only the 'unfed, unwarmed' can survive. The Himalayas form 'the last camp of experience', a place beyond language^{II7} where - in a fairly dreadful pun - 'only 'the abominable endures'. 'The Monster' returns to a more human legend, the doppelganger, a rejected lover walking 'the streets of that decaying town' until he reaches the scene of his failure, the cul-de-sac 'where the carved cherub crumbled down'. Here he finds not his lover but an 'unmoved waiting back', 'that wide mouth ugly with despair', fitting this alien, abstract landscape

'A grief defined and realized,

And living only for its sake

It was myself I recognized'^{II8}.

This doppelganger is a 'constant one', the bitterness of rejection made legend

'lest the pure feeling should decline', the simulacrum of thwarted desire. This idea attains its full horror in 'The Middle Night'. A child lifts out 'impudent and self-willed dolls from the living heap', part playfulness, part nightmare 'which took him from his sleep'. Each doll adopts its Sartrean role, from 'soldier in pose of flight' to ruined burghers, 'small men/small gods', until their manipulator - a new myth-maker - comes to recognise

'In each doll, passive, faded,
Some man who is at once
Transfigured and degraded',¹¹⁹

The child becomes an artist, writing down each history, 'jerk, posture, giggle, prance', until 'the dark is gone', both of night and fear. Such knowledge is, however, self-defeating, an awareness of human frailty which leads to its own kind of terror, legend come back to haunt its appalled creator -

'Children who know by heart
The vices of their dolls
Will stay awake at night',¹²⁰

'In Santa Maria Del Popolo', the opening and keynote poem of My Sad Captains, further expands on failure, the heroism of those already doomed, the poem drawing inexorably towards its conclusion, a journey into meaning. Even the painting itself is at first obscured - 'the very subject is in doubt' - its chiaroscuro 'brims/with a real shadow'. Evening, conversely, makes all visible, 'Saul becoming Paul' though still with 'hidden face', his 'wide gesture of the lifting arm' impressive but still essentially mysterious, undefined by dogma -

'No Ananias croons a mystery yet,
Casting the pain out under name of sin',¹²¹

Caravaggio's own life offers no explanation for the 'alternate/candour and secrecy inside the skin' that he captures, himself elsewhere painter of a 'firm insolent/young whore', the 'sharper' who were eventually to murder him. 'Hardly enlightened', Gunn turns to the congregation, old women at prayer whose 'tiny fists' clutch not for difficult faith but mere 'comfort',¹²² and 'suddenly understands Paul's 'one convulsion'. It challenges the unknown, the heart of fear, with a commitment far beyond those whose 'poor arms are too tired', a gesture understandable even to as unregenerate a man as Caravaggio, painting

'... the large gesture of solitary man,
Resisting, by embracing, nothingness'¹²³.

The full horror comes in the next poem, 'The Annihilation of Nothing', where this nothingness is itself seen as yet another false comfort, just a mirror-image of optimism and similarly illusory. Sartrean myth leaves Gunn with only negation -

'The necessary condition for our saying not is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunt being ... nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being - like a worm'¹²⁴. -
a 'huge contagious absence', a nightmare that 'nightly I rehearsed' and

'Whose end I knew, I woke without desire,
And welcomed zero as a paradigm'¹²⁵.

Making destroys such studied 'indifference', 'the landscape holding yet entire'. Despite Gunn's longing for this 'more space than space', negation is not a unique force, 'ultimate in its abstract devastations' but merely 'change', 'the atoms it divided/complete, in ignorance, new combinations'¹²⁶. Nothingness is proved just another illusion, and 'the despair, that nothing cannot be' produces its own dread, a meaningless universe which no philosophy can hope to explain -

'... Look upward. Neither firm nor free,
Purposeless matter hovers in the dark'¹²⁷.

Gunn is subsequently to explore these 'peculiar, lovely variations' direct, exchanging negation for a delight in the 'infinite finitude' of being.

Existentialism itself can now only illuminate failure, most notably in the two linked poems 'Modes of Pleasure', the first a 'Fallen Rake' who lives 'by habit of the will' and sits 'brave, terrible' as 'the will awaits its gradual end', the second the thoughts of one such 'preparing for the test'. The essential cynicism, both of hunter and hunted - 'your callous glance/meets mine, as callous and reserved' - is more pronounced than earlier¹²⁸ and this 'momentary affection' is merely a 'curiosity', a testing of 'every magnanimous device' which 'will not last long into day'. The two poems undercut each other, thought and appearance, bravery offset by calculation, triumphs which all are destined to 'be lost some time in time'. In 'Black Jackets', Gunn similarly approaches another favourite subject, the young hoodlum, with new insight, an awareness of the possibility of failure, the tattooed slogan 'Born to Lose'. The past is redundant, 'the present was the things he stayed among'.

This 'unsanctioned present' is also celebrated in 'Claus Von Stauffenberg', a 'rational man' set against the fierce 'illogic' of Hitler. In a 'landscape of despair', climate mirrors action, a 'cold time when honour cannot grow'. Claus detonates a bomb which 'Brutus rendered possible',¹²⁹ and, just as his maiming seems a ritual wound - 'two remaining fingers and a will' - so death transforms him into legend, 'honour personified', precisely at the moment of failure,

'He stiffens, like a statue, in mid-stride
-Falling toward history, and under snow',¹³⁰

'Innocence' evokes the full horror of the Nazism that Von Stauffenberg opposed. The soldier is trained in the 'egoism of a healthy body', ignorant of 'self-pity and the soul', a lack of existential consciousness (indeed, its obverse) which 'no doubt could penetrate, no act could harm'. Such 'innocence' makes him perceive atrocity only as an aesthetic pleasure - the way the 'ribs wear gently through the darkening skin', the 'violet flame' of flesh on fire - appreciating neither the partisan's agony nor the immorality of his punishment, merely

'... judge that all pain finishes the same
As melting quietly by his boots it fell',¹³¹

It is humanity itself that has failed here, creating a 'morale firm as morality'.

A few poems here transcend such failure, seeking something outside the human will which can somehow direct and transform it, symbolised here, as later, through sunlight. Just as the leather of 'Black Jackets' gave off 'sudden and anonymous hints of light', part of the 'insignia' - rites of initiation - which bind the gang together, so 'The Byrnies' erects such reflection into myth, sunlight mirrored through uniform. Needing courage to enter the dark wood, the 'heroes', united by the clash of their chain-mail, seek

'Magical signs to stay the essence
Of the broad light that they adventured in',¹³²

It is this that their byrnies provide, the sun 'reduced and steadied to a thousand points' by the shining armour. Warfare and myth coalesce,

'The great grey rigid uniform combined
Safety with virtue of the sun.
Thus concepts linked like chainmail in the mind',¹³³

each 'blunt-faced ignorant one' achieving both community and courage, sound

and light both 'vague evocations of the constant Thing', home thoughts abroad. Sunlight recurs, a new alchemy, in 'The Value of Gold' - 'and I am gold beneath the sun' - uniting poet with Nature, 'all that has, like me, turned gold'.

Gunn turns his attention to the plants above, growth monitored by their leaves

'Which colour into colour pass

Toward the last state they shall become',¹³⁴.

This 'quiet growth' comprises both fruition, 'the full form without a lack', and and yet the potential for further development, the 'still-to-grow', and it is this that the poet seeks to emulate - 'can I too be both'. 'Perpetual action' separates man from sunlight, but he too is part of this totality, the 'fulness' and sheer physicality of existence, the 'high precocious stalk' which scatters

'Features, great petals, one by one

Shrivelling to gold across my walk',¹³⁵.

If Fighting Terms was the work of a brilliant, though immature, Cambridge undergraduate, and The Sense of Movement paid homage to the intellectual rigour of Stanford and Yvor Winters, poems like these map out Gunn's future landscape, the intense sunlight, and openness to experience, of Southern California, from northern gloom to southern incandescence, from failure to acceptance.

In 'Baudelaire among the Heroes', part of a series of aphorisms on French literature¹³⁶ which attain less to sparkling perceptions than damp squibs, Gunn takes his hero to task for associating 'with not the whole but part', 'invariable/particularities which furnish hell'. However, the sleeve notes to the record On the Move are far more positive. Baudelaire's poetry combines experience and evaluation, his best work capturing both sides of the Romantic dilemma, grand aspirations and 'the helplessness of the man who submits to them',

'Baudelaire's ennui has now become democratic ... a wider, and at the same time more undefined malaise: Sartre's nausée, Kingsley Amis'

'that uncertain feeling' or the impatience of the hoodlums in some of my poems.... it is this malaise that I am trying to explore',¹³⁷.

This uncertainty, the terror of earlier poems, informs 'A Map of the City', a poem of obvious homage to Baudelaire. The modern city is a 'luminous country', both maze and haven, heir to both 'potential', the poet's 'love of chance' and light, though 'some flickering ... some steady shine'. It is this very

incompletion, the sense of limits, which affects Gunn so deeply,

'Endless potentiality,
The crowded, broken and unfinished!
I would not have the risk diminished,'¹³⁸.

Gunn is increasingly to turn from existential schemes to the real world, from his myths to those shared communally, a journey of unceasing discovery -

'seeking to understand one's deliberate aimlessness, having the courage of one's lack of convictions, reaching a purpose only by making the right rejections. Poems are actions of a sort, and by actions I may attempt to define the direction which is not mystical, or political, or necessarily one that has ever been taken before,'¹³⁹.

Part II of My Sad Captains begins the exploration of this new freedom, the sheer simplicity of existence, 'just air, unobstructed, uncomplicated air,'¹⁴⁰. The increased technical assurance of Part I - the unease of 'The Monster' heightened by the lack of its expected first rhyme, an alternation of stresses in 'The Byrnies' contrasting tenseness and loquacity, the delay of the second rhyme in 'The Middle of the Night' - is extended through experiment with syllabics¹⁴¹; their (at times) ponderous solemnity brings out in Gunn a new stateliness of language, their use of sentence structure (rather than line-ends) as the underlying form evokes a new clarity of description.¹⁴² The opening poem, 'Waking in a Newly-built House' celebrates both Gunn's move to California¹⁴³ and the poet's corresponding move to a new kind of verse, 'a manifesto setting out new ideals of sparseness and clear vision,'¹⁴⁴. Gunn wakes to a new, clean observation of things 'as they are', a new 'tangible remoteness' which sharpens his own vision in the very process of observation, perceiving only objects,

'their precise definition, their fine
lack of even potential meanings,'¹⁴⁵.

This neutrality, tree trunks lined up against the sky, absolves both the nightmare vision of 'Without a Counterpart' or 'The Unsettled Motorcyclist' - Nature not an enemy but an 'ordering' of existence - and the negation of 'The Annihilation of Nothing', instead 'convoking absences'. The poem recalls the earlier 'Thoughts on Unpacking', its 'raw new rooms' at risk from the 'unclean residue' of the past. Only love - genuine affection, not jaded dominance - can cultivate the 'ease of moving here'; 'I realize that love is an arranging,'¹⁴⁶.

This new 'arranging' takes two principal forms, the careful definition of sunlight¹⁴⁷ as a symbol for, and refinement of, the human will, and the equally determined construction of one's own persona, creating a myth from self (or selfishness), Gunn's two earliest themes reinterpreted. The poet is aided in his quest by drug visions, short cuts to both nirvana and the abyss. 'L'Epreuve' uses such tenuous insights to trace a 'sweet compact' between watcher and watched - 'The Corridor' finally crossed - 'new laws' in which reality must be deliberately chosen, 'as if for the first time', as a place to which to return. However, as such things are so dangerously prone to do, chemical revelation turns into nightmare, the poet 'afflicted', 'bombarded', 'cramped' by this inner light, directed back into the buried myths of his own imagination -

'The street's total is less near
during my long ordeal than
the turbanned legends within
my world of serried colour',¹⁴⁹.

'Lights among Redwood' again seeks reality direct, the source of light, but Gunn again finds that sunlight is diffused into 'calm shadow' - the 'muted dimness' of the forest interior - 'tone/pure and rarified'. Sunlight is here disguised in 'quick diffusing patterns', revealed only when 'we' - the poet no longer alone - look upward, held in the 'thick forms' of upper branches, 'Indian fires' of light whose 'rosy immanence'¹⁵⁰ is its own religion. The watchers stand in mute worship - these fires also actual wounds left in the wood, quiet testimony to earlier mythologising - the experience, in a double exposure, both transcendental and limiting; the witnesses 'mindless, diminished'. Such limits, the tragedy of Part I, are nevertheless now an enhancement. In 'Flying Above California', the same landscape, albeit seen from above not below, is fully revealed by that 'cold hard light without break' which exposes merely itself, Californian 'lean upland/sinewed and tawny in the sun', 'the air so clear' of the epigraph. Such restraint defines, and calls into being, fullness for

'..... That limiting candour,
that accuracy of the beaches,
is part of the ultimate richness',¹⁵¹.

Elsewhere, this sense of light is connected directly with the will, the

subject of 'Considering the Snail' which pushes a 'bright path' through his green night, moving in a 'wood of desire', the machine in 'A Trucker' which is imagined out of control, exploding into the nightmare image of destruction,

'a bright fountain of red eyes
tinkling sightless to the road'¹⁵².

Both become creatures of myth, essentially sightless - the snail's 'pale antlers barely stirring' - in a dark world which they suffuse with light, the inanimate animate - 'sometimes it is like a beast'¹⁵³ - the animal human - the 'slow passion to that deliberate progress. Such worship of self is intensified in 'Hotblood on Friday', Gunn's earlier toughs here redeemed through identification with the urban sensuality of 'In Praise of Cities'. The 'body's tight/limits' again yield, through light, those details which 'accumulate/to a sense of crude richness', the town 'gradually opening up' to him like either conquest or lover (or both combined). Contrasting with the crumbling statuary in 'The Monster' here 'stone petals' are 'bright in the warm/evening', urging Hotblood to find terms (through fighting?) 'precarious and accurate' enough to define such limits. Gunn's 'old myths are opening up to this new light, new forms of knowledge.

'The Feel of Hands', for example, develops the poet's fear of the Other, unknowable, never ultimately reachable, in a way which is at first encouraging. A lover's hands, though mysterious - 'two small live entities' - are as 'tentative' as Hotblood, touching in the dark as if separate animals, 'timid as kittens', but connected still with the surety of light, amusing hands 'shaken by daylight', the light(ness) of touch. As in 'L'Epreuve', light metamorphosises into inner dark, the kittens now 'cats, hunting without scruple', these hands plunging 'in a full formed single fury', the poet metaphorically as well as actually 'in the dark'. The chill of the unknown returns with 'à (literal) vengeance, alone again,

'I am in the dark. I wonder
when they grew up. It strikes me that
I do not know whose hands they are'¹⁵⁴.

This movement (more sensual than sensed?) from the safety of innocence - moral, sexual or even political - to the terrified knowledge of experience is again traced in 'Adolescence', the period 'after the history has been made'. Rebellion exile and atrocity all end in silence, the poet too 'part, still, of the done war'.

Gunn retreats back to the natural world - 'walking through the wet spring' - and the past - 'I pass foundations of houses' - escape turned into exploration in 'Loot'. The poet approaches past trees (redwoods?), 'softly seeding from mere/delicacy of age', and the 'green quickness' of grass - the 'high grass' of 'Adolescence' - leaving this 'brief potency' to penetrate earth and darkness, those 'low chambers' - death and sex - over which 'wary fathers stand guard'. Such penetration is both military and, again, sexual -- a raid on a village in shadow, making love 'dark below/in the boneworks' - but neither conquest yields the sought for value 'uniquely yours', both close but unknown, passive. The victims watch 'without passion/the/veer of my impassioned mind', and, at this second impasse, the poem again abruptly changes focus. Digging brings to light a 'trinket', 'nameless and useless', which, as in 'Vox Humana', 'it is for me to name and use', knowledge bringing mastery. Yet this loot suddenly reverses the whole poem, not passive but active, the poet himself not conqueror but conquered as the forces of myth and ancestry, thus summoned, resume control -

'I am herald to tawny
warriors, woken from sleep, who
ride precipitantly down
with the blood toward my hands, through
me to retain possession',¹⁵⁵

The existential self is no longer alone; it is heir to all the heroism of the past, that sense of classical tradition which gives full meaning to the present.

Heroism forms the main theme of the remaining poems in My Sad Captains, made more poignant by the increasing possibilities of failure. 'Rastignac at 45' describes Balzac's hero¹⁵⁶ in middle age, scarred both symbolically and literally, his 'debonaire weariness' and pose of the 'marvellous air of knowing' undercut by distaste at the conventions through which he has survived. Nothing the 'platitudes of Romance', not duelling, has scarred his face, that 'half-maddened wince', driving him into shadows - the invisibility of his 'dark suit' - and yet he survives denunciations, age, failure. The very scar of living is made 'attractive', a mode of endurance, yet another means of survival -

'the mere custom of living with it
has, for him, diminished the horror',¹⁵⁷

A more voluntary kind of scarring, engraving on flesh, is celebrated in "Blackie the Electric Rembrandt"^{I58}, further means to identity. Tatooing is seen as a kind of sexual initiation, the 'virginal arm' yielding to 'quick dark movement', an 'equal concentration' (of art and pain) between artist and subject. Unlike the tatoos of 'Black Jackets' - 'Born to Lose' - here it is heroism, light, the ethereal even that is evoked, a 'blue thick cluster' of ten gleaming stars - 'now he is starlike'. The delicacy and remoteness of this image carries on directly into the final poem, 'My Sad Captains' itself, both a celebration and a leave-taking, light again shining out of darkness. Gunn's existential heroes, 'a few friends and a few with historical names', shine out like stars, the past 'lapping them like a cloak of chaos', 'embodied' in their perfection. When alive they existed only for action, destroying limits for fullness, living to

'renew the wasteful force they
spent with each hot convulsion',^{I59},

whether of sex, or battle; now dead - or redundant - they fade from view, still 'not at rest' but emblems of humanity, 'winnowed from failures', who

'... withdraw to an orbit
and turn with disinterested
hard energy, like the stars',^{I60}.

Though these heroes still provide Gunn with examples of how to live honourably, by conscious action, they can be of no direct assistance - 'distant', 'disinterested', ultimately lonely ('apart') they, like the soldier in 'Incident on a Journey', are now incapable of action, frozen in the act of heroism as Claus Von Stauffenberg was at the moment of his death. With this poem, Gunn consciously sets aside his early subjects and themes, myths even, abandoned like these heroes to deep space - though their light is still to illuminate later work - and turns from sky to earth, the symbolic to the everyday, death to life.

'A good sad serious poem that rounds off this part of my poetry, poetry in much of which I emphasise the will as an end in itself. From now on, a bit more flexibility',^{I61}.

As befits its title, Positives^{I62}, Gunn's collaboration with his brother Ander, marks a new optimism - albeit fully aware of tragedy - in this study of the 'seven ages of man and woman ... in the urban proletariat',^{I63}, the poet's

first sustained sequence. Starting from the grainy realism of Ander's black and white photographs,^{I64} Gunn erects nostalgia for his native, abandoned London into further hymns to the modern city, a newly awakened concern for the failed 'the vulnerable and pathetic',^{I65} (to be further developed in Touch) into a touching contemporary legend, riches into rags. Most notably, the poet adapts the kind of quiet free verse developed by William Carlos Williams^{I66} into a subtle instrument, clear, precise, capable of conveying the colloquial - 'no music in this boozier' - or the formal - 'the terror of full repose', the concrete and the abstract with equal, and interchangeable, felicity. Indeed, it is this underlying dualism on which the whole sequence is structured.

Positives opens and closes with uncaptioned photographs, a baby just born and a winter landscape, human figures black against the snow, the parameters of life and death between which the sequence is set, in strictly chronological order. The first fifteen poems thus deal with adolescence, a steady growth towards 'the dance of her luck' from these tenuous beginnings - 'she has been a germ, a fish, and an animal' - out into the 'strange element' of air (presiding genius of Gunn's later work) and away from mothering water (in which she is still half immersed), the opening poem ending with a reminder of entropy, natural flux-

'there is a perception of
warm water, warm, but cooling',^{I67}.

Discovery continues in 'The body blunders forward', the baby now a toddler still 'doing things for the first time', this 'precarious exploration' conveyed through the first of many extended, almost Homeric metaphors^{I68}, the triumphal opening up of a hostile interior, the laying down of trade-routes. Work comes to a temporary halt in 'But childhood takes a long time', the stasis of paradox -

'Something is feeding on you,
and it is what you feed on.
The source of your strength guts you',^{I69}.

Such 'pleasurable pain' is quintessentially human and unites the physical with the mental, body and mind, to reach the masochistic delights of

'a painful conclusion
with a tooth or with a thought',^{I70},

Gunn capturing brilliantly the pensive sadness of the accompanying photograph.

This mood itself soon gives way, in 'Drink me', to an indolent savagery, the young girl now impatient for Alice's magic - 'and you grew or shrank' at will - and fully restored to petulance, phrased in the breathless rush of the young;

'In a bus it is nice to ride on top because
it looks like running people over',¹⁷¹.

'In watchful community' introduces, for the first time, other children, a 'secret society' of truants 'increasing, through the security of friendship, their contact with the outside world, rain, 'the musty/rot of wood from floorboards/ where sacks have lain'. (as in the previous poem, Gunn entering direct into the thoughts of the people photographed, an end to self-involvement). This kind of evocative description, Ander fueling Gunn's imagination, recurs in 'He rides up and down and around', the circularity of adolescence (and bikes),

'All things radiate from the spokes under
that hard structure of bars crossing
precisely and usefully',¹⁷².

This is the moment of transition, from a world where 'all things are means to wheely ends' to a progress into money, sex and age, the older boy looking out direct at the watcher (Positives makes the reader voyeur as the poet was in 'The Corridor') staring into an, apparently, limitless future, who 'dreams of cars'. 'And they start to cross the road' describes this in terms of the awakening of sexual awareness, fullness and limit, the approaching girls, 'life swelling in them', who yet still cherish 'their containment'. Unfortunately, the extended image that Gunn uses here is less well-judged than in 'the body blunders forward' conveying not, as intended, rich potential - 'compact segmented buds' - but a quite bizarre bestiality, women impregnated by bees,

'and pollen will encrust
will weigh the treading of
those black hairy legs',¹⁷³.

Youthful sexuality is better captured, albeit still in animal terms, in 'Youth is power. He knows it', a 'rough young' lion who 'growls playfully' as he encounters the 'world beyond' (still as 'strange' as in the opening poem). Such 'ease in his power' questions the 'containment' of the previous poem - 'can there be limits?'. The rest of Positives can be seen as an answer to this

question, as indeed is Gunn's work as a whole, resolving the way that

'He makes now
a fine gesture, inviting
experience to try him',^{I74}.

A similar confidence illuminates 'She rests on and in', a girl this time, whose sense of mastery over her surroundings expresses itself in laughter, 'like an expert swimmer' who playfully enjoys 'her full uncrippled strength' (which in later poems will slowly atrophy). The spread of this healthy joy is compared to ripples spreading 'outward over cool water', a mastery of the strange 'cooling' element of the first poem, the summit of continuing growth, losing

'force but continue
to be born at the centre, wrinkling
the water around it',^{I75}.

This sense of control over one's environment reaches its apex in the next six poems, three of which deal with a pop group who sing 'about life by the Mersey',^{I76}. The first, 'The music starts tentative' - structured appropriately like a pop song with bar lines and upper register - sets the scene, the audience, 'absorbed' in conversation, gradually brought to the realization (limits again)

'at the edges of themselves how
something is encroaching ...',^{I77}.

'Pete' sets the unexpected delicacy of this music against the rough background of the musicians, hands that were 'clamps for a spade' turning into 'delicate and precise instruments', even more remarkable in an artificial world where even the flowers (seen behind the pianist) are plastic. 'It is a lament and then', the third poem on this theme, though the next but one in the sequence, draws closer, like the photograph, to the singer himself. His 'clear voice' is seen to have discovered the 'bubbling source of both joy and lamentation', turning emotion into

'the ripples which course out from that
centre, ridged with strength',^{I78}.

This is identical to the spreading out of the girl's laughter in 'She rests on and in', emotion both the motivation for, and the expression of, humanity -

'feeling is the thrust in
the transparent knot, and is
the knot itself ...',^{I79}.

The poems that, respectively, precede and follow this are both concerned with the pleasures of extreme speed. The first, 'Two mirrors', is a study of narcissism, the rider 'self-regarding', his scooter 'named after himself', the outside world examined 'by a battery of headlights', though he is still himself a learner, 'tentative but with increasing momentum'. Nevertheless, this self-regard is transformed in this new environment, the world defined anew,

'he catches sight of his own face
and does not
know it against the new landscape of speed'¹⁸⁰.

The companion poem, 'An impetus: its roar, its music' describes an older and more assured rider, now progressed to a motorcycle - 'mastering and yet mastered' - the external world a blur, a 'wind on water', whose resistance 'defines the impetus' of its rider. Just as in 'Pete', where humanity existed amongst the roughly physical, here it is the 'hard centre' of this impetus, 'a gentleness projected at great speed'. The final poem to deal with adolescence, 'She can't help it, can't', also expresses mastery over the environment, still tentatively tested, the girl aware of the suddenness of happiness - 'to this music she dances the dance of her luck'. There is the same delight in one's sensuality as in 'And they start to cross the road', the same rippling joy as 'She rests on and in', an 'overflowing like tears, uncontrollable'. The rhythm of spreading water recurs, mingling with the human patterns of 'It is a lament',

'Something pulses in her, warm
rapid, and regular, with a
music she can almost hear'¹⁸¹.

This poem marks the culmination of the first movement of Positives, the gradual progress, through childhood and adolescence, to self awareness and, thus, full adulthood, emotions spreading outward like ripples in water.

The following four poems deal with marriage, the fullness snatched from vulnerability (as in 'An impetus') of 'She trembles slightly: her flesh' in which 'choice meets delight', the ironic contrast of 'The responsibilities', in which happiness arises not from ceremony but the mundane, seen as new,

'you will get home
and I will give you a big
tea on our own table'¹⁸².

Yet this too is a kind of ceremony, a continuance of the wedding ritual - the bride 'her own tender handmaiden' - into everyday routine, 'Tesco, Woolworth, and Archie's'. 'In a family, there is' celebrates humorously this very sense of monotony, the illusion of 'many doing many things' yielding to the reality, 'all doing/the same thing in the same way', the strength of family life. 'No music in this boozier' is so sad because it depicts, instead, loneliness (the burgeoning theme of the whole book) the ties of family and the hopes of youth both equally discredited. The deserted husband dozes in the 'twilight' of loss-

'She says she's with her
mother, though my
theory is it's a fellow'¹⁸³ -

although, as in 'Childhood takes a long time', pain itself becomes almost a pleasure, repose granted by the 'dry foul taste' of spent beer. This second stage of growth issues not in youthful exuberance but the oppression of middle age, fullness yielding to a sense of limits (Positives is a kind of My Sad Captains in reverse) evoked first in 'Syon House'. The ripples sent outward into the world in 'She rests on and in' begin to return, reflected back from a Nature itself arranged by man - the cultivation of water, blackberry bushes -

'but there is a mystery: strange
forms push in from outside;
I am oppressed by a sense of columns'¹⁸⁴.

The 'pressure' of these columns is 'continual' because they are outside humanity, the 'in-itselfness' of Sartrean myth, and the development from youth to age, joy to despair, traced in Positives - 'they have no mind or feeling/to vacillate.' 'Lebensraum' heightens this sense of claustrophobia, caused here not by antique stone columns but other people, and deriving, disconcertingly, from an excess of sympathy. Life cannot be, in a pun, a 'humane undertaking' for

'... in my every move
I prevent someone
from stepping where I step'¹⁸⁵.

The man must run 'into the open, alone', immersing himself in the white purity, or negation, of snow - like water, the world at speed, a bride's lace - to cauterise the 'bacillus of despair', 'rendered harmless/isolated and frozen over'.

Eden is lost, man must forever toil to repay his loss of innocence, but the mechanics of work in turn help alleviate this despair, leading gradually to 'full repose'. The next seven poems use different kinds of labour to evoke the texture of modern city life, by turns sentimental, comic, and violent. 'Like a cliff, Marble' evokes both loss - the Odeon, once almost a force of Nature, is now 'a hollow/where the encrusted cliff was' - and change, the presiding genius not commissionaires but a 'donkey jacket', the hidden order of 'distant men in caps' who 'seem 'submerged in sunlight' as earlier subjects were in water. 'We didn't do up this pub' again celebrates the passing of time, renovation not destruction - 'still divided with ornate/scrolled wood' - work again a ritual, almost mysterious, which can arrange reality, each smell 'in its place'. Even violence is placed, and thus accepted, the 'protection boys' part, somehow, of local pride, an awareness of roots (like those revealed in the previous poem),

'not like them redecorated
pubs down Chelsea',¹⁸⁶.

Equally satisfying is the labour of 'He raises the pick, point against', called 'unskilled' but the very opposite. The man delights in his precision of balance, 'his own weight divided fairly between his legs' and the skill with which he guides his pick down on 'inanimate rubble' - like guitarist, motor-cyclist and the earlier demolishers of the Odeon he imposes order on the natural world - for one must attain, again, the 'proper stance', a deliberately casual mastery,

'... Through an arc the point
falls as force, the human
behind it in control
tiring, but tiring slowly',¹⁸⁷.

An ironic contrast is pointed in 'Money is a form of dirt', also to be 'shovelled around' - whatever the social distinctions between city businessmen and casual labourers - but a weighty dirt imitated even by 'clients and subordinates', a resemblance (like the 'secret society' of earlier children) made into a regal awareness of community by the 'crowning/weight of our bowlers', from

'which weight seeps so potently that
sometimes we have to take them off',¹⁸⁸.

Comedy suddenly gives way to fear, the dirt of the previous poem resurrected,

in 'The rubble rises in smoke'. This smoke serves as a metaphor for city life - inescapable, 'an inhabited confusion', 'black snowflakes' which ironically reverse 'Lebensraum' - a 'greasy obscurity' through which people 'fumble towards each other'. Although unsatisfactory, this is better than the 'pure and open air' of the countryside for, again in contrast to 'Lebensraum', at least contact is possible; 'on the downs/one would be merely alone'. This encounter with other men, existentially 'the other', is not always pleasurable. In 'At times, on the edge of smoke' the same situation (and presumably the two men standing to the left of the previous photograph) issues into sudden, unexplained violence, again 'fumbling toward each other' but to 'get you out of the WAY', obscurity of syntax matching the obscurity of the action, (the natural sadism of 'Drink me')

'words will not do, it has
to be got from the blood'¹⁸⁹.

Music, which expressed harmony in 'It is a lament' or 'She can't help it', has returned 'distorted, uncontrolled', just as the impulses which prompted pop-singer, motorcyclist and bride alike are now 'excreta', the same negation as expressed in 'Lebensraum'. Violence turns back on itself, 'I want to/get myself out of the WAY'. The same lassitude infects 'the bored waitress of 'The liver and onions is off' - 'so, it appears, are the customers'. The fresh experience sought in earlier poems itself is seen as a dead end, just as it is possible to grow tired of both work and city life, Gunn questioning his own rationale,

'You can tire of the town
and the variety of the pavements
being endless, itself may need
varying. But with what?'¹⁹⁰.

This question remains unanswered, though it is significant that the two remaining sections of Positives deal with, in turn, relaxation and the coming of old age, repose and its concomitant, oblivion. If life pushed the earlier poems outward into youth and vitality, death now seems gradually to be beckoning its subjects home. In the following two poems, relaxation is mirrored by ritual, the tea-break of 'I have closed my briefcase, dropped my' which unites business man, labourer, barmaid, roadsweeper, even fighter - the subjects of the previous seven poems - the espresso coffee and 'expensive cake' of 'You have no idea'.

Both poems are undercut by irony, the mock Augustan praise of relaxation - 'O Teapot, heavenly maid, descend' - by the cockney register of its celebrants - 'make it strong Jonesy' - the ennui of having 'servants and jewels' by an admission that such gentility is fake (as were riches in 'Money is a form of dirt') the difficulty even of 'seeming to lead such a life'.

The remaining poems deal with old age, memories ~~subvert~~ the risks of further experience. In 'The pigeon lifts', a roadsweeper rests, again, from clearing away the rubble earlier on fire to watch a passing young girl. The 'leavings/of other men his takings', he treats this as another chance find, carefully

'cataloguing an authentic
treasure in the quiet
collection of his mind',¹⁹¹.

In a curious visual pun, the man's pigeon-toed stance evokes a young bird, its mate cowering in 'fear and delight' - a pointed contrast to the old man's lack of 'hope or even much desire' - its pink claws, like the 'baby's featured hands' of earlier photographs, contrasted with the man's face, 'like some gnarled/shiny section of black wood'. This process of ageing is further explored in 'The memoirs of the body', the imprint of experience 'ambiguous', the spectacularly lined face in the photographs - lines for a book - able to be read two ways, as

'the ability to resist
annihilation, or as the small
but constant losses endured',¹⁹².

Certainly, life itself is held in the spaces between where 'the sentences cross and recross', but, in a grim afterthought, the 'memoirs' retained in these lines, the face as its own book, are inevitably doomed, a kind of last will and testament

'(Please destroy in
the event of death.)'¹⁹³

In 'He feels a breeze rise from', this death literally hovers on the wind, bringing 'intimate contact with water' to an old man, leaving, like youth, that it 'lightly touches'. 'Wind on water', for the motorcyclist of 'An impetus' an energy to be mastered, is beyond the old man; he merely 'goes on talking' as it passes. In the next poem, 'It is stone: and it ripples', the wind has become 'cold, stone hard' and the tramp can feel only 'the flat/stone of the

bridge', the 'ripples' of youth and hope sent out in 'She rests on and in' and 'It is a lament' now beyond him. Such allegory has now lost its meaning - it is not a symbolic/bridge but a real bridge' - and the old man's discomfort is not metaphysical, as in 'Lebensraum', but actual, Salvation army tea 'not sweet enough'.

Positives ends with a similarly pathetic figure, an old female tramp who sleeps 'on old papers' outside an abandoned house, as ruined as her. 'The mould from baked beans' describes the processes of decay, an 'infected compost' - developing the motif of disease, real and as a state of mind, from 'Lebensraum' - of 'bones, leaves, slabs/of rust, felt, feathers'¹⁹⁴. Just as the infection in this rubbish is 'slow, slight, deep, and...responds to warmth', so the old woman 'has certain needs' and 'stirs in the sun', brought back to life. In 'Poking around the rubbish', the woman searches this rubble - the 'inanimate' detritus broken down in 'He raises the pick' - for meaning, memories of a happier time in the past 'near Maidstone once, hop picking', working with husband and children in 'the dim leafy light of the overhanging vines'. However, 'she can't find what she wants', these reminiscences are now also redundant,

'All in the rubbish heap now
some rotting, most clean vanished'¹⁹⁵.

The structure of experiences built up in Positives crumbles back to nothing, mere oblivion¹⁹⁶, with encroaching death all that remains, and it is this that is caught in 'Something approaches', poet, camera and death all closing in on the old woman. She looks up, with an expression of terror, death a 'silence in the wainscot/by her head', 'a chill...in her groin', moving silently towards her 'like moonlight on the frayed wood', inexorably 'floorboard by floorboard'. The poem ends by dispelling her fears - 'will it hurt?' - death a welcome respite from the rigours of age, a return to the first photograph of all, the self-containment of birth, no more consciousness, no more poetry, achieved peace.

'Let it come, it is
the terror of full repose,
and so no terror'¹⁹⁷.

The final photograph, a snow scene - unlike 'Lebensraum' taken in the country not the city, not one person but many, at play rather than in pain - indicates¹⁹⁸ both the end of the whole process, and yet also a new beginning, a new birth.

In Positives the circularity which structured so many of Gunn's early poems is elevated into legend, an endlessly replayable narrative - birth to death, hope into acceptance - in which human existence is turned into an everyday odyssey. These mere 'verse captions'¹⁹⁹ exude a new, and welcome, sympathy for those whose weakness, failure or poverty denies them classical heroism. Positives creates instead a contemporary legend, drawing closely on memories of a London childhood²⁰⁰ in which the mundane is transformed into art, the everyday into a metaphysical scheme. Myth plays around the edges of reality just as poems do around pictures, 'the forms dancingly reciprocate: words authenticated by the camera, photographs loosed from rigidity by poems'²⁰¹.

This new interest in myth-making (rather than myth-taking), together with an allied delicacy of perception, a controlled fluidity of technique, comes into its own in Touch, Gunn's most perfect (least imperfect) collection²⁰². Reviewers noted its 'unsentimental humanism'²⁰³, its 'newly 'seductive' style'²⁰⁴ - though some were sufficiently unseduced to find 'the old toughness ... more likeable than the new tenderness'²⁰⁵ - and yet still a mastering classicism, poetry with 'the elegance of a Greek vase'²⁰⁶. In terms of his own dual definition of the classical tradition, which opened this short survey, Gunn has moved from 'close limits' and 'restraints both technical and personal' to 'continuing the life and society' of earlier literature, 'evaluating, adapting, naturalizing' classical myth and culture through his own legends, teasing the past into the present.

Gunn has himself defined Touch, both poem and collection, as an 'allegory for the touch of sympathy that should be the aim of human intercourse'²⁰⁷ and this is here set against the kind of existential self-control which the poet earlier celebrated whole-heartedly. The tension derived between these two contradictory qualities - reliance on oneself and the need for others, will and desire - shapes and unifies the whole book. In 'Confessions of the Life Artist'

'The art of designing life
is no excuse for that life'²⁰⁸,

self-definition no longer quite enough. Nevertheless, the Life Artist attempts to shape his own existence, to become a force of Nature, standing on the 'extreme shore of land' and countering 'disordered rhythms of the sea' with a firmness

'I derive from these rocks, which
inhibit the sea's impulse'²⁰⁹.

Such simple divisions are unworkable in an unstable world, the self insubstantial, the very elements uncertain - 'air/haunted by the taste of salt' - and this same incompleteness forms 'material for my art'. In section II, this newly achieved consciousness is contrasted with, not derived from, the natural world, whose denizens 'have lost themselves in action' - birds which 'sleep in flight', the 'lily's pale waxy gleaming'²¹⁰ - and are ignorant of their own mortality, 'thought for the morrow'. The Life Artist must not similarly 'lose myself in thought', his own philosophy, which shapes the rest of the poem, set out in section III,

'You control what you can, and
use what you cannot'²¹¹.

An early section, now omitted, deals with various actions, comically juxtaposed, which form 'improvisations on a central theme, attempts to define one's own identity, and direction, once 'I was conscious of its being there',

'To enter Jerusalem
on an ass, talk with Ammon
deflect to the East, or wear
a rosette for Arsenal'²¹².

Man's whole life represents an attempt 'to name and extend ... this inaudible theme', the definition of self. Section III now becomes clearer, for this kind of action is both exclusive - 'to reject the thousand, and/to select the one' - and dangerous, such 'goodly people' must 'live between extremities'. Section IV considers those 'unchosen', those who do not define their own objectives.²¹³, and views them 'as if dead', merely serving to 'validate the chosen', for what

'!could be more fortifying
to one's own identity
than another's suicide'²¹⁴.

Gunn makes clear, at last, the inherent selfishness of existentialism, depending on a small elite of the chosen set against the large mass of those who have not attained consciousness, the new damned²¹⁵. and this becomes increasingly unacceptable, an art which shades into witchcraft, arcane ritual, fascism itself,

'If there are forbidden arts,
mine must indeed be of them'²¹⁶.

The remaining six sections investigate the Life Artist's relationship (or virtual lack of it) with others, section V dealing with a love affair in which the girl becomes 'indefinite', while he is 'starkly/redefined at each moment',

'aware of her need, and trained
to have few needs of my own',²¹⁷.

Nevertheless, such 'magnificent control' is suspect, he remains unsure of himself, for what if this girl, 'immersed in despair', still 'has the edge over me?'. As section VI argues, giving way to passion is 'merely whoring', but to be in total control is 'to be a whore master', consumer rather than consumed, and it is to this that the Life Artist aspires. Loading his girls with chocolate cannot help possess them, precisely because love is still seen as a battle - rather than the 'touch' of subsequent poems - and dominance can never yield to emotion, never

'possess red hair like hers, fresh
cheeks or bee-stung lips like hers,
or a wasteful heart like hers',²¹⁸.

In section VII, he again desires 'not what I have, but what I wish to have', externalising his own vulnerability onto others - the girl whose dated 'bee-hive' hairstyle calls forth 'jibes that grow inside me', the poet both torturer and victim²¹⁹ - and thus reveals at last a real sensitivity, even if self-directed,

'Why was something evolved so
tender, so open to pain?',²²⁰.

- This sudden sympathy continues into section VIII, the 'famous picture',²²¹ of a young Jew 'being hustled somewhere' by the Nazis, under the control of others, suddenly vulnerable in his warm 'cap and cloth coat', almost unbearably pathetic. Whatever he has just experienced, he can...!see_nôw no appeal in the wide world. A second stanza since omitted considers such atrocities, the Life Artist grown old and able to understand the mystery of existence 'no more by living through/than if there were no design'. Nevertheless, he has at least attempted to improve life, to 'lift weight off the earth's crust' no longer out of selfishness but sympathy, to

'bring strength into existence
so that the world could bear it',²²².

In section IX, 'prophecies become fulfilled' although in an uncontrolled way, almost as if to 'conform/to some alien order'. The Life Artist grows old, but

still seeks a rational pattern, and his search nears its end now that 'circles start to close, lines to balance'. In the final section, the Life Artist reviews his existence in the face of death, destined to be forgotten - with poet and clown, Shakespeare and George Formby - here 'where the swine root'²²³, the whole solar system eventually to be 'irretrievably lost'. In Positives such decay was at least merely part of the cycle, here it is irreversable, absurd

'For the loss, as for the life,
there will be no excuse, there
is no justification'²²⁴.

The failure of existential self-control, in the face of mindless Nature, lies behind many of the best poems in Touch, most notably in 'Breakfast', in which dramatic monologue again shades into contemporary legend. In a life 'without future' in which nothing is real - even night 'tempered by hotel signs opposite' - the 'unsour pungency' of breakfast, though neither 'remedy' nor 'ritual', acts as the basis 'for a tenacity' which can spur man into action,

' - without love, without hope, but
without renunciation'²²⁵.

Environment is again mastered in 'Taylor Street'. The old man watches 'what he is not living' and, albeit indirectly, participates in life, 'carefully getting a little strength' from passers-by, a sense of ritual by which to endure,

'..... He has it
all planned: he will live
here morning by morning'²²⁶.

Whereas in earlier poems this watching of others was a voyeuristic intrusion²²⁷, here it is a kind of sympathy, part of 'touch', which involves 'a certain strain', the old man sitting 'without a smile ... cupped by himself in himself'. Another old man is the hero of 'The Produce District', again coming to terms with the natural world through a natural, sympathetic mastery. In the 'interim', in a disused fruit market, between demolition and rebuilding, 'spiders, rats and rain' regain control of this 'crumbling and decay', pigeons like unwelcome ghosts

'Perched on the roofs and walls,
Or wheeled between the faded signs
And broken ornamental scrolls'²²⁸.

The old man resists this encroachment, standing 'unmoving on the littered ground'

shooting pigeons with an air gun, driven by self-definition into returning an

'... accurate answer to the wilderness
Echoing it, and making it complete,'²²⁹.

By imposing his will on Nature, to prevent 'the place losing itself', conversely he makes it complete. The poem thus ends with an image not of death but new life - the sportsman's energy transformed - 'maple shoots push upward through the ground'. 'The Goddess' celebrates this same energy, a rebirth into sexuality, through myth, the annual return of Proserpina from Hades as an unstoppable natural force, 'naked and searching/as a wind'. Neither 'eyeless fish' or 'fire rock, water or clay' can 'dissipate her force', a raw vitality which fuels alike reeking 'sinewy thyme', 'rats/breeding, breeding, in their nests' and (no less ambiguous) the anonymous soldier, 'his greatcoat collar up', seeking 'a woman, any woman', where metamorphosised into goddess, woman into tree -

'her dress tight across her ass
as bark in moonlight ...,'²³⁰.

As in many other poems in Touch, which it opens, it is the human sense of limit here which defines the wholeness of the physical world, celebrates such totality,

'Proserpina: it is we
vulnerable, quivering,
who stay you to abundance,'²³¹.

This idea of limits yielding to fullness, the partial justifying the whole - first sketched out in My Sad Captains - is further developed in 'In the Tank'. A prisoner, 'fearful, ungrateful', studies the cold functionalism of his cell, even in the dark manifesting 'an order without colour, bulk or line'. Though 'the total riches could not fail' they still can contain limits, the 'silence of a jail' itself containing 'a box, a mere suspension, at the centre', a void

'Where there was nothing left to understand
And where he must re-enter and re-enter,'²³².

The real imprisonment is, again, meaningless routine, that sad circularity which underlaid Gunn's early work, here faced, at least, direct. 'No Speech from the Scaffold' again considers man's poise in the face of oblivion, here not in ritual but impending death. It is again the starkness - and mundanity - of reality which is so disconcerting, the 'grey gritty soap' in the cell, the scaffold here,

'like something for kitchen use', an executioner who 'works in a warehouse nearby.' The condemned man is similarly unspectacular, silently 'nodding a goodbye to acquaintances', his dignity 'its own commentary' in the face of negation,

'as he rests there, while
he is still a human',²³³.

'Bravery' presents another ambiguous hero, 'brave with separation', a man - like the Life Artist - whose very limitations challenge fullness, invite loneliness,

'For he has become his
outline, and holds no
warm clutter of detail',²³⁴.

He is caught, like Claus von Stauffenberg, at the static point of heroism, set to leave his native land, 'indeterminate pale/grey-and-yellow', for the 'smoky swirl' of chaos, but such existential 'bravery' suddenly becomes sinister, the man now a 'giant vampire' whose first step will 'suck the country dry'. Gunn at last comes to recognise this 'monstrous lover' - back turned not in separation but duplicity - as his own reflected image, a doppelganger²³⁵ whom 'I gaze at/every time I shave'. 'The Girl of Live Marble' develops this unease further, both oneself and others finally alien, unknowable. (except as refracted in legend). Voyeurism is further refined, the girl's own 'candour' a kind of simplicity - 'she looks to see, and not to seek' - through which the watcher 'comes to his own rest', the strength of her self possession the very 'essence' of truth,

'Through merging surfaces expressed
And her unformulable presence',²³⁶.

He 'longs to share' nothing 'beyond the adequacy she is'. However, by attempting to own such freedom - 'O Otherness, impervious, near' - he destroys it, an image only, a 'goddess of live marble' through which he mythologises his own desires and thus sees only himself reflected, back in the hell of (existential) loneliness.

'..... But as the watcher
Moves close, it is himself he sees
On the bright convex - clear in feature,
Little, and caught by darknesses',²³⁷.

The remaining poems in Touch explore the way out of this cul-de-sac of self-involvement, risking the 'touch' of sympathy to turn limits into fullness, the reliance on self into a mutual dependence on others, domination into desire.

The title poem describes this very process, the poet 'loosened' from vigilance to openness, his 'resilient chilly/hardness' softened through contact with the warmth of his sleeping lover - a 'mound of bedclothes' against which the household cat contentedly 'braces its paws' - the 'patina of self' at last broken down. Such comfort is mutual, the other similarly seeking protection, not desire, as if

'the nearest human being to
hold on to in a
dreamed pogrom'²³⁸.

Both sink into an 'old big place', 'there already' though 'hard to locate', the instinctual security of love which 'seeps from our touch' and connects both these lovers and all creation, sympathy erected into myth, an archetypal fullness -

'enclosing cocoon round
ourselves alone, dark
wide realm where we
walk with everyone'²³⁹.

Vigilance again yields to openness in 'The Vigil of Corpus Christi', the Roman soldier left to guard Christ's tomb himself brought fully to life, resurrected. At first a 'sentinel to limits' - his body 'scattered' in discomfort', 'steadfast' as the darkness he confronts - his vigil defines him, 'sharp with abeyance'²⁴⁰, but the quest for self has become circular, self-defeating, 'the invasion of himself at last/merely by himself'. It is not resolution - 'to be steadfast' - that liberates him but his dog's moist tongue (another domestic pet part of this 'touch'), not stoical self-restraint but 'unsoldierly joy' at this revelation, a

'soft sweet power awake in his own mass
balanced on his two feet, this fulness'²⁴¹.

In 'Pierce Street', again, the friezes present men 'twice life-size', new gods,

'A silent garrison, and always there,
They are the soldiers of the imagination
Produced by it to guard it everywhere'²⁴².

Like the Roman soldier, they use 'the limits of their station' to 'vigilantly preserve as they prevent', but their 'large abstracted eyes' have lost humanity; only 'those who are transitory can move and speak'. The poet too is 'bodied in my skin' but he contains within himself the capacity for development, the challenge of whatever makes 'the floorboards creak'.

Limits and fullness again interact in 'The Kiss at Bayreuth', the world in flux - 'colours drain, shapes blur' - a disintegration which love briefly delays 'before it is sucked/into the eye of the cyclone'. Human perception 'bares and discolours the world' but reduces it to order, though aware of its own mortality.

'The inhuman eye contemplates
its own calm inclusive fulness,
its tendency, even, toward death'²⁴³.

The lovers²⁴⁴ temporarily combine the stillness of this vigil with the flux of Nature - their kiss both expresses this chaos and is 'annulled by it' - losing consciousness for the brief climax of their 'touch', both quick and dead, to 'move in awareness and be still', to 'for one moment ... not think of themselves'. This war against flux, the very texture of resistance entering the poetry as abstract description, continues in 'Berlin in Ruins'. Gunn emphasises the sharpness of surfaces, both literal and metaphorical, which helps the city survive its conquerors - Berlin has 'an edge, or many edges' and 'totters beneath associations' - its 'bronze Imperial fantasies/squirming with plump hauteur' even when about to be demolished. Fears revive of the 'dark hysteric conqueror', these 'tarnished blades of laurel' - plants grown sharp as swords--~~can cut~~, infect memory.

'But you encounter a resistance,
and yourself resist. It is at once
unyielding in texture and fertile'²⁴⁵.

The conquest of France was so swift, 'the hectic that overtakes process' as to be unnatural, sinister. Defeated, the German spirit can either decline under its own weight of history - the 'high circlet' of imperialism 'bathed in poison now' - or survive through this very rigidity transmuted, 'harder and sharper than bronze' into its own stiff laurel, Nature metamorphosised into the art of ceremony. In 'Snowfall', this resistance is turned not against defeat but winter, humans 'circumspect against the white', their body heat 'closely hoarded', like Berlin 'sharp-edged, darkly filled in'. Life continues 'unseen below', earth also hoarding life within itself, brooks, 'under hard panes withdrawn deep', which

'Still work a secret network through the land
With iced and darkened flow'²⁴⁶.

honeycombing the land beneath with 'galleries of their sleep', its contours

following 'each subterranean bay and fall', a hidden, potent sense of order. Yet the snow remains alien, unconquered, an element 'dazzling and complete' which resists both man and stream, 'joining, dividing', flux made manifest, unknowable,

'Not quite resistant, not quite palpable,
I find an edgelessness'²⁴⁷.

In the closing poem, 'Back to Life', man and the natural world, individual and community, are united in the central image, separate leaves on the same branch. Nature is again 'edged' but, in the gathering dusk, the lime trees in the park - 'bunched black at equal height' by man - diffuse the lamplight, 'transparent as if they too gave light'. A similar sense of order is reflected in the other strollers in the park - Gunn no longer alone - 'at ease/as if just woken', 'devouring each detail' of this new world. As in Positives, all ages are here represented, as if emblematic, the young 'cocky with surplus strength', the old 'weakening with each move', but all are united in sudden, enlightened, community-

'As if the light revealed us all
Sustained in delicate difference
Yet firmly growing from a single branch'²⁴⁸.

This vision is hard to retain, 'the branch that we grow on ... not easily remembered in the dark', seemingly illusory in times of 'cold and misery', but it can be erected into a *modus vivendi*, a myth by which to live. Metaphor and reality coalesce in a dreamlike conclusion, the movement between shadow and light shared by bough and leaves, essence and surface, a community, eventually, of death-

'A small full trembling through it now
As if each leaf were, so, better prepared
For falling sooner or later separate'²⁴⁹.

This same vision, man and Nature united first in life, ultimately in death, is turned into legend in 'Misanthropos'²⁵⁰, Gunn's most enduring work, both technical tour-de-force²⁵¹ and a new myth for our age, man metamorphosised into beast to more properly become man. 'Misanthropos' is a poem for two voices, a narrator and the 'last man' - Gunn's early heroes redefined - the sole survivor of some cataclysmic war. At first a man who hates his fellow men, close contact with Nature redefines him (as it has Gunn as poet) and restores him to humanity, existential selfishness subverted, finally, for genuine community.

The first section of 'Misanthropos', 'The Last Man', shows this survivor - never named, part of myth not fiction - merging his existence with the rhythms of Nature, the opening poem a (similarly rhythmical) series of curt descriptions,

'He is clothed in dirt. He lacks motive.
He is wholly representative',²⁵².

The misanthropos melts both into silence and thicket, uninterested in fellow survivors - 'he builds no watch tower' - learning, like the birds, to 'keep movement/on the undipped wing of the present',²⁵³. This 'counsel of the senses' is self-protection, not simple evasion, occasionally breaking down under the 'relentless memory of monstrous battle', a deliberate negation of 'thought or feeling'. The man, a 'lived caricature' of his race, chooses not fullness but limit,

'He avoids the momentous rhythm
of the sea, one hill suffices him
who has the entire world to choose from',²⁵⁴.

Such imagery is not random; the dirt later a reminder of humanity, memory of battle returning to haunt 'Memoirs of the World', this sea's mirror image - dust's bitter ocean - the mastering motif of the whole work, its first and last metaphor. Poem II uses the Renaissance echo poem²⁵⁵ to express the last man's existential dilemma - classical form, modern unease - left only his consciousness,

'What have I left, who stood among mankind
When the firm base is undermined?
A mind',²⁵⁶.

The 'long war' is at last ended, 'no one' else has survived, the only emotion possible 'disgust', only self-knowledge setting him apart from engulfing Nature,

'Yet with a vacant landscape as its mirror
What can it choose, to ease the terror?
Error',²⁵⁷.

Man cannot exist in full knowledge of either himself or the world, so he has to play a role to survive, even though he must eventually rejoin his fellow-men, face together the community of death. Error, necessary at the time, yields at last to truth, existentialism to a new, less selfish, philosophy, and it is this development which the rest of 'Misanthropos' so painfully traces, 'man turning angel',²⁵⁸, the survivor a 'courier after identity',²⁵⁹.

The remaining three poems in this opening section further examine the 'last

man's' search for a structure, watching a 'pattern grow among the disarray'. In poem III, the misanthropos sloughs off, 'bit by bit', his role as messenger, a failed search for self - one cannot 'bear dispatches between elm and oak' - in favour of a more natural disguise, a 'clumsy frock' of 'skins of mole and rabbit'. This remains 'a sort of uniform', however. The 'curled darling' has merely adopted a new audience, natural not human, the wind uttering 'ambiguous orders' like his generals, his girls now the 'nodding foxgloves'. He must seek, not evade, identity.

'With a bone needle he pursues himself,
Stitching the patchwork spread across his lap'²⁶⁰ -

must come properly to know himself. Such a pattern is confirmed, in poem IV, by the steady orbit of the moon, 'distinct where all is dim', the 'last man' looking upward from where he 'lies in shadow'. Such 'ancient rhythm almost comforts' but it is still insufficient, 'inanimate', a place where 'relics of emergent matter freeze'. The earth has evolved from 'the youth of things' to produce man,

'Down here, two more births followed on the first:
Life, consciousness, like linked catastrophes.
Their sequence in him cannot be reversed.'²⁶¹

Man's representative must accept this inheritance - 'immersed' in life and self knowledge, existentially a 'pour-soi' to the moon's 'en-soi' - as he accepted the war, played as the 'imperfect moon' but set apart by freedom, 'consciousness that plots its own end'. It is man, again 'bathed in shadow', not the waning moon whose imagination makes him 'the clearest light in the whole universe'. Poem V deals with another kind of pattern, the 'brown earth gap in green' made by the last man's 'repeated tread', subduing 'endless' Nature, consciously avoiding its pitfalls, the 'poisoned beds'. It is an image of intellectual discovery, not metaphorical but direct, 'process made visible', an avowal of continued freedom,

'Bare within limits. The trick
is to stay free within them.'²⁶²

The poem, and the first section of 'Misanthropos', ends not with philosophical speculation, however, but with rain, 'drops are isolate on leaves, / big and clear', presaging peace and renewal, the misanthropos integrated with the natural world.

'He breathes the barbarous smell
of the wet earth. Nothing moves
at the edges of the mind.'²⁶³

The second section of 'Misanthropos', 'Memoirs of the World', hardens this resolve into perception, the 'last man' no longer evading the 'onset of hatred'²⁶⁴ but encountering his memories without pretence, speaking to the reader direct. Poem VI opens quietly, like I, with simple, orderly narration - 'It has turned cold. I have been gathering wood' - but modulates into a recollection of the 'done war'²⁶⁵. The man is, again, allied with the wild birds, his steady labour counterpointed by their song, 'two falling notes - a sweet disconsolate tune', which in turn reflects his depression, a dying fall. Similarly, the 'cold red setting sun' revives nostalgia (brusquely denied by this sad refrain) for a sunset

'Which coloured, similarly, the white grey, blackened
Iron and slabbed concrete of a sentry post
With its cold orange. Let me live, one second,
Not now, not now, not now'²⁶⁶.

Such memories are 'most poignant and most weakening'; however mundane the past, 'warmth and light' were 'diminished less than now'. Even the birdsong stops, and yet this suddenly provokes an extraordinary volte-face, this nostalgia discredited.

'The bird stops. Hardening in the single present,
I know, hearing wind rattle in a bough,
I have always harked thus after an incessant
Not now, not now, not now'²⁶⁷.

The refrain is not a denial of life but 'my deepest thoughts translated'²⁶⁸, an escape from memory, responsibility for sweet inaction, long yearned after, which now defines him. Thus rendered powerless, the past can be properly assessed. In Poem VII, the misanthropos is thus able to disinter his previous, self-erected cult of mystery - 'an armed angel among men' - darkening out reality to 'perceive an exact structure, a chart of the world'. Such abstract posturing could not (as his present, more natural search for limit) satisfy the 'hunger in the senses. He remains a 'presence without full/being', obsessed by shapes lacking substance - 'thin wails of foghorns', paint bubbles - no longer sure of his real identity,

'Was I entering the role
of spy or spied on, master
or the world's abject servant?'²⁶⁹.

The remaining four poems in this section partially solve the mystery. In poem VIII the firewood so laboriously gathered in VI is alight, another image for man,

a 'hard silence' set against the 'glowing fall of ash', resisting the fire's flux.

'Exact in being, absolute in balance,
Instruct me how to find here my desire',²⁷⁰.

To thus separate essence from image (as in VII), 'the matter from its burning' is the 'last man's ideal, and fire seems an appropriate metaphor - I think I grasp it' - itself the 'peculiar lovely variations',²⁷¹ of time, 'each into other ... constantly turning', the world a 'dying ember', evil glowing 'like a spark'. Such brief illumination is (as in VI) quickly upended, 'merely pain, evil's external mark', the fire not time but the man's own past, mirror not metaphor -

'The neighbouring cinders redden now together,
Like earlier worlds to search, where I am shown
Only myself, although I seek another',²⁷².

All is eventually rendered down as dust - it is not fire but man who can burn 'from sympathy alone'. Indeed, lack of sympathy damns the 'last man' in poem IX. Like Edgar²⁷³ once a 'serving man', his 'sturdy body' tends both sexes, striving to divinity in a perverted world, 'a god of charm/an untirable giver'. All is pretence however, this 'fragrant impulse' a mask for hidden savagery - secretly

'I served myself a trencher
of human flesh in some dark
sour pantry, and munched from it',²⁷⁴.

The 'curled darling' of III, he 'gave readily' not from charity but deception, not the world's servant but its master - 'needing me, needing me'. In penance, he now diets on 'berries, water and the gristle of rodents', but self-denial is not enough, he hungers still for human contact, 'at times I am ravenous'.

The misanthropos must first endure winter, however, and the 'snow vision',²⁷⁵ of poem X. Staring out at this 'emptiness of matter', mind becomes servant, again, to his 'unhinged body', sinking at last into genuine self-appraisal (botched in VI)

'till it enters the heart of fever,
as its captive, unable to stir',²⁷⁶.

His vision seems to reflect this fever, the dryad's balance first echoed -

'I watch the cells swimming in concert
like nebulae, calm, without effort',²⁷⁷ -

only to crumble again. An intruder appears, germ of unease, beautiful - 'tendrils like an anemone's' - its touch 'an act of/enfolding, possessing, merging love',

a parody of life itself (and man again its artist). Human existence similarly invades the material world, entertains it briefly, and leaves it quite unaffected,

'enthralls a universe with its rich
heavy passion, leaving behind it
gorgeous mutations only, then night'²⁷⁸.

The lust of IX, the 'blurred outline' of VII are rightly seen as diabolic, this waking nightmare its own expiation, and the last man 'can sleep now'. Human perception may 'harden but diminish', like snow, but at least it challenges the very oblivion it recognises, replaces loneliness with a desperate sympathy,

'yet still there may be something retained
against the inevitable end'²⁷⁹.

Sympathy is made manifest in poem XI, 'Epitaph for Anton Schmidt', his fellow men 'not gods or vermin' but equals, even if 'another race at that, and strangers'. Schmidt refuses to play out his given role as Nazi persecutor, to submit either to snow²⁸⁰ or 'the blackmail of his circumstances'. His actions are neither 'glamorous nor profitable', his heroism - which kills him - is wholly admirable precisely because he regards others, not himself, and thus attains self-knowledge,

'Breathing the cold air of his freedom
And treading a distinct direction'²⁸¹.

The third section of 'Misanthropos', 'Elegy on the Dust', consists of one extended poem, one extended image, the centre of gravity for the whole work. The poem charts a descent - both literal and evolution in reverse - from the last man on his 'final hill' through the 'lower thicket, its animals 'interdependent in the shade, down to where, beneath all existence, the expanse of dust waits, across a calm and deep'. Dust is a sinister mirror-image of the 'sea' (made 'snow'), hanging 'as if frozen in mid-roll', waves that cannot fall but 'imperceptively ... shift'. It is both a death force, choking dock and fern 'fathoms deep', and yet mere slave to flux, 'vexed with constant loss and gain', both sea and its very negation,

'But seas contain a graveyard: here
The graveyard is the sea, material things ...
Are all reduced to one form and size'²⁸².

The dust is both image for death and its actuality, rendered down fragments of spent life - 'claw, scale, pelt and wings' - graveyard, also, of the human race, its 'imperfection endlessly refined/by the imperfection of the mind'. It is such

imperfection that makes man mortal, broken down in 'this universal knacker's
yard'²⁸³ to at last attain purity, the 'motion of life' reversed, born into death -

'The remnants of their guilt mix as they must
And average out in grains of dust
Too light to act, too small to harm'²⁸⁴ -

the betrayals of the past subsumed in a timeless present. Each 'colourless hard
grain is now distinct', but drifts 'with its neighbours' at the wind's mercy,

'Perfect community in its behaviour.
It yields to what it sought, a saviour'²⁸⁵.

Man becomes, at last, not individual consciousness but 'scattered and gathered'
with his fellows, not scheming deceiver but subject to 'the wind's unpremeditated
labours', permanently 'on the move', 'hurled/in endless hurry round the world'.

The fourth, and final, section of 'Misanthropos' describes how the 'last
man' is metamorphosised into 'The First Man' of its title, this community of
death imitated and prefigured by survivors of the holocaust. In poem XIII, the
present is, at last, 'a secure place to inhabit', the past - 'so bitterly recalled
in 'Memoirs of the World' - 'now 'fallen from the mind', the future, like the path
of V, 'a repetition, only, with variations'. Action has disposed of thought,
the man 'an unreflecting organ of perception', the nightmare of Xefled (like snow)
'Slow as a bull, in moving; yet, in taking,

Quick as an adder. He does not dream at night'²⁸⁶,

II's echo redundant. Such willed animality - the misanthropos 'furred', 'mole-
like' (in III he was merely mole-skinned) - is at least a partial, curtailed
solution, self-reduced to 'a mouth', 'a nose'. Properly symbolic, the 'first man'
stands in 'a thicket of time', fully integrated with 'Mother' earth, rooted firm,

'Watch, he is darkening in the heavy shade
Of trunks that thicken in the ivy's grip'²⁸⁷.

Night yields to cold daylight in poem XIV, a 'smudge' of approaching men -
'unturnable/and unforeseen' - destroying such willed isolation for ever, 'last man'
no more. Such sudden knowledge is painful, 'mouth struggles with the words that
mind forgot', and he fantasises a 'shadowed pool' that could wash away mortality

'Skin tautened from the chill, emerge above,
Inhuman as a star, as cold, as white,
Freed from all dust. And yet he does not move'²⁸⁸.

Dust, as in XII, represents humanity as well as mortality, community not separation,

'Perpetual that unease, that world of grit
Breathed in, and gathered on the hands and feet,'²⁸⁹,

the misanthropos turning again from animal into human, 'a little more upright/in picturing man almost becomes man too'. All he needs now is, like Anton Schmidt, that 'touch' of sympathy that truly separates man from the beasts.

This occurs in poem XV. 'Stony as a lizard poised on stone', he watches from his 'stony ridge', still a voyeur, stillness counteracting their flux,

'Below, the indeterminate shape flows steady
From plain to wood, from wood to slope,'²⁹⁰,

a resurrection from dust to man, plain to hill, death to life (XII reversed).

'Unmoving and unmoved', the misanthropos can coldly study, as in VII, man's frailties - 'what a ribbed bony creature,'²⁹¹ - his terrible openness to wounding,

'And on the thin chest two long parallel
Clear curving scratches are discernable,'²⁹².

And yet this proves crucial. Stung by imagining another's suffering as his own, he 'performs an action next/so unconsidered that he is perplexed', leaving his shelter, his disguise. As the wounded man, startled, falls back toward the dust

'He stops, bewildered by his force, and then
Lifts up the other to his feet again,'²⁹³.

Movement again demonstrates sense, terms redefined from warfare to 'touch'.

'Misanthropos' no more, he enters a new world, clear 'as when a cloud slips from the sun' - 'the same and yet more green and detailed' - the surveyer surveyed,

'Bombarded by perceptions, rearranged -
Rays on the skin investing with a shape,
A clarity he cannot well escape,'²⁹⁴.

This impulse of sudden, uncogitated sympathy - which 'he does not yet understand' - acts as sunlight, Schmidt's example presenting a 'distinct direction' for that old existential self-awareness to gain awareness of the whole community of men, 'the other' to become no longer threat but promise, not mystery but revelation,

'He is clothed in dirt. He lacks motive.
He is wholly representative,'²⁹⁵.

The final two poems of 'Misanthropos' clarify this new reality and yet put it back in full perspective, the work still essentially tragic, legendary.

Poem XVI sees man and community, the particular and the abstract, coalesce -

'they file past my mind, my mind
perched on this bare rock, watching'²⁹⁶ -

the tribe looking 'full' at one who once wore dark glasses, was 'presence without full being' (in VII). Now anonymity yields to naming, Armageddon to Eden,

'What is the name Adam speaks
after the schedule of beasts'²⁹⁷.

The old 'bitter dizziness' still persists, of course, the 'scratched man' neither 'hero or saint' - Gunn's earlier exemplars - but fallible, failed human, 'the stale stench/the hang-dog eyes, the pursed mouth'. The misanthropos almost falls, literally and metaphorically, but rejects 'memoirs of the world', IX's servitude;

'It is a bare world, and lacks
history; I am neither
his lord nor his servant'²⁹⁸.

He evokes 'an act of memory', the 'words that mind forgot' of XIV, to forge a genuine communion, stretching out 'the word to him/from which conversations start', naming him in turn. Poem XVII repeats the same action - 'others approach' - viewed not by 'first man' but detached, philosophic narrator, this mutual 'touch' seen to prefigure the final community of the dead, skeletons embracing,

'The touched arm feels of dust, mixing with dust
On the hand that touches it'²⁹⁹.

As in V, it is pattern that, however unwittingly, defines mortality, creates a meaning - 'and yet a path is dust, or it is none'. The war - which his earlier self-seeking, his later courage 'both partly caused/and partly fought' - has been survived, his mortal flesh 'which he hardly feels', feels the dust it has raised. He can no longer hide behind 'dark glasses', shielded egotism, for each man must

'Turn out toward others, meeting their look at full,
Until you have completely stared
On all there is to see'³⁰⁰.

Mortality focuses humanity, death throws the life we share into relief - 'sharp outlines break, in movement, from the edge'³⁰¹ - although all these survivors³⁰² can pool is oblivion, all they can erect is sympathy 'against the inevitable end'

'..... Immeasurable,
The dust yet to be shared'³⁰³.

'Misanthropos' is a legend of rebirth, the 'last man' abandoning mankind to more properly join it, escaping the past to fully discover the present. Starting in summer - 'green overtaking green' - the action develops through autumn - 'it has turned cold', the making of a fire - to winter's discontent, - 'all that snow pains my eyes' - back to the new life of spring, 'the year has recovered and put forth many times'. If Positives made legendary a single human life, birth to death, here Gunn creates a seasonal legend, death to birth, retreat to fulfilment. The misanthropos represents us all. Behind this legend flickers a myth, Circe's enchantment of men into beasts - the 'last man' joins the natural world, himself cannibalised his fellows - and Ulysses' reversing of the spell, beasts back into men, the 'first man' and his tribe united by human sympathy. This myth becomes overt in Gunn's next collection Moly, classical myth replacing self-made legend to

'create in oneself a field which will be spontaneously fertile for the³⁰⁴ tests of sympathy...a proper exploration for several lifetimes of books', the dust at long last yielding to sunlight.

Moly³⁰⁵ puzzled its early reviewers, exposing their naturalistic straitjackets rather than any failing in Gunn himself - Douglas Dunn discerned a 'gaseous metaphysicality',³⁰⁶ Ian Hamilton the lack of any 'vital imagistic centre',³⁰⁷ Alan Brownjohn the 'freakouts awful',³⁰⁸ Michael Fried 'slipshod technique' and a 'poor ear',³⁰⁹. Other poet/critics with less dogmatic axes to grind were correspondingly less hostile, John Fuller (surprisingly) welcoming the return to traditional prosody and yet the banishment of the 'old calculated abstractions',³¹⁰ Jubian Jabb tracing 'a journey into light',³¹¹. The best account of all was anonymous³¹² - morally and aesthetically Gunn has escaped his former implication that 'the only alternative to existential alienation was a dangerous undermining empathy', now separateness and responsiveness are joined both technically and thematically. As usual, however, Gunn remains his own best critic. Moly can be seen as 'a debate between the passion for definition and the passion for flow' or 'a history of San Francisco from 1965-9' or 'a personal memoir' of those same years, but it is more properly about Greek myth - symbol of 'our own potential for change' - about

'Odysseus's meeting with Hermes, his eating of that herb, and his reflections on metamorphosis in the remaining walk before he reaches that thick stone-built house',³¹³.

Moly opens with a loose translation drawn from the *Odyssey*³¹⁴, Hermes 'in the likeness of a young man, the down just showing on his face', his gift moly - 'a herb, one of great virtue'. Unredeemed man may be, like Circe's pigs, 'brutal greedy and dull', but moly can 'help us to know our potential for change' -

'even though we are in the power of Circe, or time ... we are free to make or unmake ourselves as we were at the age of ten'³¹⁵.-

whether existential or psychedelic. Moly describes just such a metamorphosis, animal back into man, 'misanthropos' into community. Indeed, its structure corresponds closely to that of 'Misanthropos'; man's imperfection and his fall from innocence, attempts to rediscover his sense of unity with the natural world, this communal ideal at last achieved. Both works attempt, almost secretly, to shed new light (literally) on the predominant mythic archetype of English verse, the fall and redemption of man. If Milton adapted Christian myth³¹⁶, if Tennyson rewrote the Matter of Arthur³¹⁷, then Gunn has attempted no less, in Moly, than to redefine classical myth, continuing 'the life and society that was behind the literature'³¹⁸ into the modern world, circularity finally yielding to a new direction, myth at last structuring a new reality.

The opening two poems of Moly evoke Circe's magic transformations, boy into stag, man into swine. 'Rites of Passage' celebrates the ritual of adolescence³¹⁹, innocence abandoned - 'my play is earnest now' - for a sexual maturity 'all planned before my birth'. Indeed, images of sexuality and animality cohere, horns that 'bud bright in my hair' hardening 'towards a completion' just as skin hardens into beard³²⁰. There are further, stranger metamorphoses - beast into tree, tree into sunlight. Horns 'bud bright', skin is 'barklike', blood is 'like light',

'Behind an almond bough,
Horns gaudy with its snow,
I wait live, out of sight'³²¹.

The boy's real force, however, is Oedipal, challenging his 'Father' direct - 'Old Man', 'Greytop' - a banished son returned to love mother earth, to kill his past;

'I stamp upon the earth
A message to my mother.
And then I lower my horns'³²².

In 'Moly', the enchantment has worn off, the spell remains. One of Odysseus' men

comes gradually to horrified self-knowledge, 'what beasthood skin she made me take'. 'Jostling mobs' reduce to pig, method disappears into bulk -

'Oh a man's flesh already is in mine.

Hand and foot poised for risk. Buried in swine'³²³ -

a greed like that of the 'misanthropos', 'if I was not afraid I'd eat a man'³²⁴.

This greed, nevertheless, has a purpose; it seeks escape just as 'bristles', and 'hide' seek the 'cool flesh of magic', animality seeks (kind) metamorphoses.

'Direct me gods, whose changes are all holy,

To where it flickers deep in grass, the moly'³²⁵.

'Nightmare of beasthood' transmutes to 'dreaming the flower I have never seen', fealty to vision, but as yet repentance is only skin deep, image not essence, a wish merely to 'rise to skin/and human title, putting pig within'.

The next three poems further explore this imperfection, in 'For Signs', seeking to transcend it. Gunn watches closely the changes made by moonlight - its shadows 'hard as board', its gleam imitated by a 'chicken bowl' - another kind of metamorphosis, 'the field survives, but with a difference'. Nature can resolve man's split between individual and tribe, 'each clump of reeds/is split with darkness and yet bristles whole', the revisited nightmare of part 2,

'Watching not things, but lunar orgy, chase,

Trap, and cool fantasy of violence'³²⁶.

Gunn describes an uneasy dream, 'sleep like moonlight', seeking the past. The moon enters Scorpio, and the poet sees his younger self, 'those cindered passages',³²⁷

'His tight young flesh is only on the top.

Beneath it, is an answering moon, at full,

Pitted with craters and with empty seas'³²⁸.

Part 3 returns to reality, analysis. The moon's phases are not 'inconstant' but 'cycle that I in part am governed by', moly to cure night's blindness -

'How light fills blinded socket and chafed mark.

It soars, hard, full, and edged, it coldly burns'³²⁹..

an 'invisible seed' which swells to 'rake the oubliettes of pain and greed'³³⁰.

Lamplight mimes such an action in 'Justin', the worst metamorphosis of all, seeing

'His live flesh flake like onion-skin

From finger-bones where it had held,

And saw the muscle fray within,

Peeling from joints that bunched and swelled'³³¹.

Flesh is not just degraded, as animal, but dissolved, just as the park - 'clasped round by sweet rot and the autumn dark' - decays into winter, an objective correlative for Justin's impatience, 'transparent with dissatisfaction'. This sense of waiting that 'wears as hard as action' continues into 'Phaedra in the Farm House', a different myth³³². The Oedipal triangle of 'Rites of Passage' is replayed at 'the cold dead end of night', 'kin warmth' is not enough,

'I cook the food two eat,
But, oh, I sleep with one,'³³³.

Phaedra studies her stepson, Hippolytus, for signs of manhood - 'those scrubbed boy cheeks' - dealing out both cards and 'a grown man's fate', violent animality -

'Sharp through the last whole hour.
The chimney will be split,
And that waistcoat be blood,'³³⁴.

The rest of Moly seeks a path up from this abyss; the following three poems counteract violence with innocence, moonlight with the power of the sun, forced metamorphosis with the genuine, healing unity of Nature. In 'The Sand Man', for example, an early beating has made man into animal, 'without a thought, or much desire', a tourist attraction 'at the postcard's edge', a 'damaged consciousness'

'Reduced itself to that mere innocence
Many have tried to repossess,'³³⁵.

Like a force of Nature, his body is 'sun-stained', armoured with sand, moving in 'patient reperformed routine'. He enters, thus, paradise, 'that old trust', a direct simplicity merely 'pleased to be', made precious where sun melts as sand -

'He feels a dry cool multiplicity
Gilding his body, feet and hands,'³³⁶.

'Apartment Cats' again celebrates the true innocence of the natural world, its trust - 'white bib exposed'. They play, re-enacting myth - 'Ben Hur along the corridor' - but 'their usual prudence' remains. Even in mock, tense fight

'If either, though, feel claws,
She abruptly rises, knowing well
How to stalk off in wise indifference,'³³⁷.

In 'Three', it is a 'three-year' child who possesses such innocence. The same nuclear family as in 'Rites of Passage' and 'Phaedra' - man, woman, child - have been swimming, 'the pull and risk of the Pacific's touch' countering the man's

sexuality, his 'cock hangs tiny and withdrawn'. The mother relaxes in sunlight, more acquiescent to Nature, resting on the beach's 'hot round stones', but still

'Her weight to theirs opposed

And pressing them as if they were earth's bones',³³⁸.

Only the son, like the apartment cats, is 'rapt in endless play/in which all games make one', fully his body 'sturdy and volatile'. He is, like the sandman, unstained, 'brown all over - his parents 'striped white where cloths have been'- happily nude whereas they 'had to learn their nakedness', fully innocent.

The next four poems see fallen man attempting this same innocence by entering Nature direct, a heroic failure. In 'Words' the poet stands watching the 'dark exactitude' of light, shadow cast on 'a sunlit bank of pale unflowering weed'. With the 'obsession' of that earlier moon-watcher, a swinish 'greed', he attempts to 'make it mine', turning perception into (this) poetry, nature into his own myth. However, words yield to a more precise observation, the whole not the part, 'limber detail, no bloom disclosed', loss of his own 'sharp outline',

'I was still separate on the shadow's ground

But, charged with growth, was being altered,

Composing, uncomposed',³³⁹.

Writing turns to metamorphosis, the writer righted, growing into knowledge. 'From the Wave' presents another kind of merging, man into ocean. The achieved balance of 'On the Move' is recast, with surfboards not motorbikes, moving with the surge of water - 'the mindless heave of which they rode' - not against the surge of air. The surfers are mysterious - 'from their hiding rise to sight' - possessors of 'a learn'd skill' in which 'it is the wave they imitate/keeps them so still', for a few, precious moments 'half wave, half man'. Even descent is an art, . . .

'Balance is triumph in this place,

Triumph possession',³⁴⁰,

each wave may 'lose itself' but man can innocently play - 'two splash each other'- carefully display his mastery - waiting 'until/the right waves gather'. - resist such inevitable loss. 'Black figures' seek 'fringe of white', moly's duality.

In 'Tom-Dobbin' metamorphosis shifts back to man into animal: not stag or swine but horse, the centaurs of classical myth, like moly, root into flower. Nevertheless, such a division is potentially tragic - the wolf-boy again - a

crucial split between Tom (Thom?) and Dobbin. At first, such merging is joyous, a 'luminous seed' that joins mind with eye - intellect with perception as in 'Words' - an 'imperceptible transition' between the 'blond down',³⁴¹ of flesh and the 'glossy chestnut brown' of hide. In section 2, both join together at the moment of orgasm, Tom's 'interested stare' yielding to involvement, 'hot in his mind' becoming incandescent, ecstasy expressed, again, in terms of light -

'A shock of whiteness, shooting like a star,
In which all colours of the spectrum are',³⁴²

If 2 is deliberately prosaic - 'oh what luck' - then section 3 makes the same action mystic, mythic. He, the unified whole, 'plunges into orgy' like the surfers into water, 'veined with sunshine' like the sandman, entering Nature -

'The cobalt gleam of a peacock's neck, the course of a wind through
grasses, distant smoke frozen in the sky, are extensions of self',³⁴³

Abandoning the senses brings an inner light, 'neither sun nor moon, close and brilliant', that can illuminate the 'debris' (the dust of 'Misanthropos?'), reveal a new creation, 'dark shining tables of rock that rise, inch by inch, out of the turning waters'. Section 4 captures this further transition, sea into land, sea-bird into mammal, through that absurd mammal, the duck-billed platypus:

'Millions of years ago mixed habits gave
That crisp perfected outline, webs, fur, beak',³⁴⁴

More touching is a more central unity - perverted in 'Phaedra in the Farm House' - mother and child, son 'hatched into separation' but still part of his mother,

'If you could see through darkness you could see
One breaking outline that includes the two',³⁴⁵

Section 5 describes an ideal merging, 'ruthlessly gentle, gently ruthless', Tom and Dobbin, mother and child, 'circle clasping round an unmarked centre' to enter 'the haze' together - light again - twin 'selves floating in the one flesh we are of', again the community of (eventual) dust. 'The Rooftop' brings us, gently and literally, back to earth. Gunn, like Justin, feels dissatisfied, can no longer simply 'watch the gardens fill/with sunlight', sees only 'bits, not an ediface',

'Perception gave me this:
A whole world, bit by bit.
Yet I can not grasp it',³⁴⁶

He rejects such 'fragile lights' for seeds 'which light fills from decay', the sun-drenched plant a true edifice, 'ruthless in clean unknowing', its seed

'Compound of rot, to wait,
An armoured concentrate
Containing its own birth',³⁴⁷.

The process is endlessly circular, 'from seed to death to seed', just as each night 'the light drains from the hill', each morning the gardens 'hold/waiting for when they fill'. Gunn's early curse, the trap of endless repetition, becomes his salvation - the dust of 'Misanthropos' is escaped through 'green closed passages', the 'death-rich earth' to be celebrated in 'The Garden of the Gods'. Sunlight 'can tear', 'frets earth' but it fuels this constant metamorphosis.

The next four poems examine more closely this 'state of unending alteration', employing extreme states of awareness, hallucinogenic drugs, psychedelic music. 'The Colour Machine',³⁴⁸ helps attain the first. Like the 'concentrating passion' of 'Tom-Dobbin', it evokes creation, 'matter approaching and retreating from the brink of form'. Man can either give himself to such mindless flux - becoming invisible, a god - or, like the poet, merely observe, merely speculate,

'perhaps his consciousness still lives in the intensity of that moment.
I am visible and do not know',³⁴⁹.

Such hidden knowledge is again offered in 'Street Song', drugs as freedom, moly -

'Your head will cut out from your hair
Into whichever self you choose',³⁵⁰ -

their pusher a second Hermes, 'too young to grow a beard', looking 'through every one who passes (invisibility again). 'Midday Mick' is scrupulous with his wares, a bringer of metamorphosis - his LSD will 'scrape your brain/and make it something else again' - part of the world he sells. This same 'landscape of acid' is described direct in 'The Fair in the Woods', Hermes again present as a 'mounted angel',

'Points glowed among his hair: dark-haired, dark-browed.
He supervised a god's experiment',³⁵¹.

Sunlight again brings unity, these 'points', the 'children of light ... pulsing among the pulsing trunks', those who watch from upper boughs 'ripened in the brilliant air'. Unlike the disparate families of 'Phaedra' or 'Three', the 'speed family' here, 'dappled by the sun', pool their stillness, 'ten energies

working inward through the one', horns close 'into one sound', light joins 'to one long dazzling burst'. Even when, at the end of the LSD trip, merging ends -

'Knuckle takes back its colour, nail its line.

Slowly the tawny jerkins separate,³⁵² -

Gunn knows that they will, in a more natural way, 'recombine in the autumnal dusk'. As in 'The Rooftop', the coming of night - 'there is little left to shine' - is merely a respite, 'the horns still call. In 'Listening to Jefferson Airplane' rock music enhances this unity, linking perception and intellect, a Zen parable:

'The music comes and goes on the wind,

Comes and goes on the brain'³⁵³.

The following four poems draw still closer to the granting of moly, sunlight.

'To Natty Bumppo' posits the poet as explorer, 'grey eyes watchful', noting 'the ruder territory opening up', as in Positives a 'feeling forward'. The 'field full of folk' of 'The Fair in the Woods' is the first step to a new world,

'The first field of a glistening continent

Each found by trusting Eden in the human'³⁵⁴,

'sun-shot' and 'held in common', fit ground for moly. 'The Garden of the Gods' makes such processes mythic, 'the constant vision of the race'. Nature is once again Eden--'all plants grow here; the most minute ... is in its place' - set in 'intense undazzling light', stems as if gilded, moly at last discovered,

'Nowhere does blossom flare so white!

Nowhere so black is earthmould under!'³⁵⁵.

Such visions, as in 'The Fair in the Woods', soon fade, 'though it may come again', and are beyond rational explanation, 'trope or parallel'. Indeed, 'meaning, thus, was superceded' as night succeeds day. Gunn stands in a real garden, set free -

'Where my foot rests, I hear the creak

From generations of my kin,

Layer on layer, pressed leaf-thin'³⁵⁶ -

the dead 'merely are', they 'cannot speak', part of the whole cycle of existence. Men go not to dust but humus, fuel for the living, life's foundation -

'This was the garden's place of birth:

I trace it downward from my mind,

Through breast and calf I feel it vined,

And rooted in the death-rich earth'³⁵⁷.

Such richness continues into 'Flooded Meadows', the 'unity of unabsorbed excess'. Flood water 'has mapped irregular shapes' (as in the 'unoutlined land' of 'To Natty Bumppo'), life's only messenger 'tangles of long bright grass'

'Distinct as islands from their valleys freed
And sharp as reefs dividing inland seas',³⁵⁸,

and yet 'definition' is replaced by boundless light, separateness by unity. In contrast, 'Grasses' is set in 'the dust of summer', its 'dry dark smells', but Gunn again studies closely the 'restless grasses' which lap his vantage point, imitating water not covering it. Each separate blade leans 'to one body' in the wind, a form of life 'rising from below', attempting to reach up to the poet -

'They round off all the lower slopes, and blow
Like lights on bended water as they climb',³⁵⁹.

The 'withdrawn sound' of a distant harmonica mirrors this 'spiky body rising from the ground', a 'wail uneven' of wind and human instrument, man merged with Nature-

'It is the sound, half tuneless and half tune,
With which the scattered details make advance',³⁶⁰.

The final five poems of Moly describe the fulfillment of this precarious unity, metamorphosis into sunlight. In 'The Messenger', moly turns man to angel, Hermes (or, perhaps, Odysseus) entranced by a flower 'whose name he does not know' for it brings full meaning, 'completes him through his sight'. Kneeling on mother earth - 'crude, granular and sour' - he imitates its stillness, 'repose of unblown flame/that nests within the glow of grass', earthmould into sunlight, 'quiet and reaching as a flame'. Only time will grant illumination, fruition

'Later the news, to branch from sense and sense,
Bringing their versions of the flower in small
Outward into intelligence',³⁶¹.

In 'Being Born', Gunn reaches a new kind of perception. Just beyond sight, twin margins 'stretch from top to bottom, sky to beach', shadows of his own birth.

'Midwife and doctor' are faintly set against 'bright crinkling foam', man blended into boundary, but as this vision clarifies it fades, leaving only incomprehension-

'Must I rewrite my childhood? What jagg'd growth
What mergings of authority and pain,
Invading breath, must I live through again',³⁶².

Is this memory or prophecy, history or myth - the answer is both. All life is in

a state of constant flux, the tanker that has just slipped 'behind a distant ridge' set 'between moving air and moving ocean', 'a formal-S of smoke' its one memorial,

'The metal, guided, cuts through fall and lift,
While the coils from it widen, spread and drift
To feed the open currents of the air'³⁶³.

Energy - the 'furnace that connects them' - is the sole motivation.

This idea continues into 'Being Born'. 'Cracked wood steps' lead Gunn to a scene of desolation - barbed wire, sky a 'pearly damp grey', his own flesh 'dark and lined'. The only light source is artificial, an advertising slogan - 'huge blond glass' - blinking on 'line by line'. Section 2 considers such fecundity,

'Currents of image widen, braid and blend
- Pouring in cascade over me and under -
To one all-river. Fleet it does not pause,
The sinewy flux pours without start or end'³⁶⁴.

Flux is a river from which the poet can abstract 'fence, word and motion', on whose surface the mind can both 'ride separate' and yet remain subject to its tensions, like the surfers of 'From the Wave', the wind-blown blades of 'Grasses'.

'But this brief cresting, sharpened and exact,
Is fluid too, is open to the pull
And on the underside twined deep with it'³⁶⁵.

Section 3 brings resolution. Gunn studies the 'weathered boards' of section I with a new exactitude, 'terror and beauty in a single board', the fence 'a tracery fronded and ferned, of woods inside the wood'. Such details, 'splinter and scar', are poured - like light, like the river, like rain from 'the overhanging sky'. Gunn's friends too are part of flux - 'through light we move/like foam' - they choose to abandon themselves to it, as to the 'colour machine',

'Hostages from the pouring we are of.
The faces are as bright now as fresh snow'³⁶⁶.

Flux is 'at the centre', 'its roar unheard from being always heard'.

The penultimate poem of the sequence, 'The Discovery of the Pacific', marks the end of a journey, both that described here, and that in search of flux, of sunlight, of moly. Two lovers have followed the sun west to the Pacific, across the 'dusts of a brown continent' to the flux of endless ocean. Discovery contains loss, travelling 'emptier of the things they knew', reduced to a natural trust -

'Only his lean quiet body cupping hers
Kept her from it, the extreme chill. By degrees
She fell asleep ...',³⁶⁷

The 'grime' of travelling, humanity's imperfection, is washed away as the lovers stand 'chin-deep in the sway of ocean', buried in flux, in sexual Eden,

'And come, together, in the water's motion,
The full caught pause of their embrace',³⁶⁸

The guilt, the incompleteness of earlier poems is dissolved in innocence, the whole sequence gathering to a climax in the final poem, 'Sunlight'. Just as moly was a looking glass for Hermes - pierglass revisited - so that which reflects sunlight is 'light's token', something 'more than shown', the 'raptures' of Eden

'Re-turned to woo the original perfection,
Giving itself to what created it ...
It is as if the sun were infinite',³⁶⁹

It is not, of course; sun like moon is 'an image, only, of our own desires', Gunn retains, from 'Misanthropos', his knowledge of the dust. The sun, like man, is 'imperfect and deteriorating', knowledge counteracts desire, and yet sunlight still 'outlasts us at the heart'. It is the long searched for moly (the Grail),

'Great seedbed, yellow centre of the flower,
Flower on its own, without a root or stem,
Giving all colour and all shape its power,
Still recreating in defining them',³⁷⁰

The sun grants the definition of 'At the Centre', the perfect community glimpsed in 'The Fair in the Woods', and thus serves as an ideal image of man turning, like Hermes, into angel, into god. If 'Misanthropos' ends with the community of the dead, then Moly ends with the living, redeemed from the animals, transcendent -

'Enable us, altering like you, to enter
Your passionless love, impartial but intense,
And kindle in acceptance round your centre,
Petals of light lost in your innocence',³⁷¹

Moly shows Gunn successfully turning personal preoccupations into concerns shared by all, personal history into the archetype of classical myth. Like all true users of myth, progenitor not parasite, he continues the tradition, his work not cul-de-sac but using the old maps to explore new routes, new landscape. Robert Duncan's 'Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's 'Moly'',³⁷² celebrate the

myth by extending it, making it more clearly a study of adolescence - 'the year my father died died into me'. Duncan's self-comparison with William Broome - a hack translator who helped Pope to subjugate the Odyssey into rhymed couplets - is perhaps more apt than intended: his verse lacks the tight structure of his mentor. 'Moly' extends Gunn's vision of beasthood into too obvious a parable of the Fall

'Dear Beast, dear dumb illiterate
Underbeing of Man where
violence at last comes home riding',³⁷⁵ -

moly too crassly dope; 'weed', 'the psychedelic air'. Again those two poems that orbit, verbally, around 'Rites of Passage' labour mightily to produce a cardboard Pan (who, in the preface 'under his winter sun had roused the wildness with his song'), the 'darkening intent' of Circe - no longer Nature but Jocasta,

'She had her will of me and will not
let my struggling spirit in itself be free',³⁷⁶.

Again, Gunn's restraint - his first need from classical myth - becomes clear. Moly weaves together disparate themes, finally balanced in 'Sunlight'. 'The root was black, the flower was white as milk', and a duality is pursued throughout - horns that 'bud bright' against mother earth, moonlight that splits the darkness, lamplight 'clasped round' by autumnal dark, oil-lamp in 'the cold dead end of night'. Sunshine absolves the sandman, the family of 'Three' but more fruitful is the 'dark exactitude' of 'Words', the 'black shapes on boards' set against the surf's 'fringe of white'. In 'Tom-Dobbin' blond and brown shade toward each other, evoking 'a shock of whiteness', 'dark shining tables of rock'. Gunn gradually comes to see these as not opposite but complementary, a garden eternally moving from sunlight to darkness, a colour machine 'in a state of unending alteration', Hermes 'dark-haired, dark-browed' as he supervises a 'god's experiment' of light. 'The Garden of the Gods' makes such tension enhancing, divine - 'death-rich earth', and intense light, death and life, earth and spirit -

'Nowhere does blossom flare so white!
Nowhere so black is earthmould under!',³⁷⁷.

Soil, 'crude, granular and sour', produces 'repose of unblown flame', darkness 'at the centre' a 'steady pouring' of light - faces 'bright now as fresh snow' - that continues into 'Sunlight', 'the whole side of a world facing the sun'. Moly

at last transcends duality, 'without a root or stem', escapes from the dust, the animality that produced it, escapes into pure, innocent sunshine.

There are other mastering images used to evoke this myth. Most notable is that of water, perfect symbol of flux, dissolving away restraint, reflecting light-

'Small glinting scoops, after a wave has broken,
Dimple the water in its draining back'³⁷⁸.

In 'Three' the Pacific's 'cold, live sinews' haunt the man still - its 'pull and risk' similarly hypnotising the surfers of 'From the Wave' who seek mastery over this 'mindless heave' - a metamorphosis into 'half wave, half men'. Tom-Dobbin plunges into the 'easy eddies' of orgy, in 'At the Centre' perception itself is liquid, mind surfing over matter 'and on the underside twined deep with it'. In 'Flooded Meadows' water directs grass, in 'Grasses' grass imitates the flow of water, and 'Being Born' uses horizon as metaphor, ocean as a repository for dream. 'The Discovery of the Pacific' returns to the scene of 'Three', Moly a quest into water as well as light, moving ever westward (with the sun) to where 'it fails', exchanging the grime of humanity for an eternity of love, perfect community. Man is resurrected into ocean, into light. If Gunn's Fall is into animality - stag, swine, onion-skin - then his Resurrection is into innocence, the nakedness still to be learnt in 'Three', the sexual merging of body and spirit in 'Tom-Dobbin', the endless creation of 'At the Centre'. The early sense of circularity that plagued Gunn's existential work is subsumed in constant flux, constant development, 'still recreating in defining them'. The outward rippling of new life in Positives - 'born at the centre, wrinkling/the water around it', coursing out 'ridged with strength' - flows out to the edge, from 'yellow centre' to petals. Gunn reaches that 'shadowed pool' dreamed but not attained in 'Misanthropos', an escape from dirt to ocean, humanity redeemed not evaded, not solitary self-reliance but sexual climax, joining his sad captains in their orbit of light to,

'Skin tautened from the chill, emerge above,
Inhuman as a star, as cold, as white,
Freed from all dust ...'³⁷⁹.

It is ironic that such apotheosis involves a kind of suicide, a final metamorphosis from life into eternal death, like moths to a flame, like heroes burnt on their funeral pyre. Gunn has mythologised, again, his desire for oblivion (Positives

and 'Misanthropos' both end in its acceptance), water that drowns as well as purifies, the sun that burns as well as illuminates, a love whose acolytes devote themselves to their immolation, to their own, deeply willed, extinction

'And kindle in acceptance round your centre,
Petals of light lost in your innocence'³⁸⁰.

In Jack Straw's Castle³⁸¹, Gunn retreats from myth back to legend, from a complex solidity of style to a 'relaxed, even jokey tone'³⁸², from a carefully constructed whole to a series of individual poems, connected organically by

'such matters as self-destructiveness, solipsism in the aspects of both freedom and imprisonment, the strategies of inconsistency and self-restraint'³⁸³.

If John Bayley found this merely 'counterfeit' poetry, 'dull, anonymous and communal'³⁸⁴, then Patrick Swinden admires just such 'occasions of mystical or narcotic unity', this dwelling on 'the facts of merging and separation'³⁸⁵, Clive Wilmer excuses 'a surprising gaucheness' of style for a new political awareness,

'the need to deal with contemporary history. 'Nixon's era', with its corruption and rigidities, is portrayed as a betrayal of the system of institutionalized change on which the United States was founded'³⁸⁶.

I would profoundly disagree. Gunn has always been peculiarly attuned to the zeitgeist, and has made his legends to express, not evade, contemporary reality. If his early, embittered, existentialism reflected the drabness, the anger of the National Service generation³⁸⁷, 'Elvis Presley' captured the first stirrings of teenage revolt, 'Misanthropos' refined to prophecy the fears of the anti-Nuclear lobby (and transcended them) while Moly represents the apogee of 1960's idealism, sex and drugs and rock n' roll. Jack Straw's Castle mythologises the decline into the 1970's, experience following after innocence, the descent to Charles Manson, to Watergate, to the 'me' generation, and yet remains hopeful, undeterred, open,

'So a five-year chunk of your life produces not merely an anthology of random observations: the sum of reflection and perception makes a design probably more honestly worked out than if you had originally planned it that way'³⁸⁸.

Section I of Jack Straw's Castle³⁸⁹ opens with three poems that are 'part of the whole debate between flux and definition; the intrusion of 'natural' rhythms into the fixities of traditional prosody'³⁹⁰. 'The Bed' opens, as Moly concluded,

with sexual ecstasy, with snow, but disillusion is all. Snow represents not hope but stasis - 'drifts quilt the ground', inside the lovers are 'loose-twined across the bed' - sex, as in 'Carnal Knowledge', can no longer unite body and spirit. 'Pulsing stops' but continues 'inside my head', the lovers view themselves, impassively, 'like wrestling statues'. In 'Diagrams', conversely, statues come to life, the shell of a half-built skyscraper seems a natural force, a mesa, a god -

'Diagrams from the sky, as if its air

Could drop lines, snip them off, and leave them there'³⁹¹ -

its builders acolytes, 'sky men'. It is not accidental that they are Indians, guardians of the landscape's deities, yellow boots replacing moccasins' but still worshipping 'the studded bone-edge of the giant', its magnanimity 'to the air'. Two further metal totems are celebrated in 'Iron Landscapes', the 'bare black Z' of a fire escape and the distant Statue of Liberty. Gunn evokes cool city functionalism - the 'seething incompleteness' of water, 'hard flower' of metal - a 'dream of righteous permanence' that resists 'Nixon's era', 'copper pieties' that contest deceit. As if in sympathy, Liberty seems to gesture her freedom, again giving herself up to air 'raising her arm/lorn, bold, as if saluting with her fist'.³⁹²

The following five poems pursue this search for truth, meaning. In 'The Corporal', Gunn recalls the soldier/lovers of Fighting Terms but each stanza ends in death - uniform, balance, the poet's own 'passion and concern' - a kind of bitter moly, 'ballets with symmetry of the flower'. 'Fever' presents, in a less confused early draft³⁹³, a man 'like an allegorical figure of pursuit', souring into malice, watched by Gunn 'not as covert friend/but picturing roles reversed'. He needs rest, not audience, repose not conquest. In 'The Night Piece', such stasis is again part of Nature, the dual exposure of 'The Bed', 'toward sleep like fog, through fog like sleep'. 'Last Days at Teddington' finds such duality both nostalgic and yet fruitful. Garden meets home - 'how green it was indoors', 'how sociable the garden was' - although such a compromise cannot last, house returns to 'board and shelf', 'the garden fell back on itself'. Human and natural world at last fully interact in 'All Night, Legs Pointed East'. The poet is in bed, yet simultaneously 'between two San Francisco hills', awaiting Spring, rebirth, life-

'Like loosened soil that packs a grassy hill

I fill it wholly, here, hungry for leaf'³⁹⁴,--

'The Geysers' turns this into myth, a search for godhead through Nature. In 'Sleep by the Hot Spring' garden is, again, 'bedroom, where we learn the air'. Meteors echo 'starlit scalps' of geysers, man a simple reflection of landscape-as was the misanthropos, but this is communal - 'what I am now has woken'. Section 2, 'The Cool Stream', further mines this collective unconscious (made open), the elegant snake that 'does not watch itself', 'keen brown thrust' of twin birds as one, people - 'talking animals' - at play, achieving a hard learnt repose,

'For though we have invaded this glittering place
And broke the silences, yet we submit:
So wholly, that we are details of it,'³⁹⁵

The third section, 'The Geyser', traces the stream back to its source - as in his earlier two works, dust and sunlight - 'heat from the sky, and from the rubble of stones'. In 'For Signs' flesh covered a moonscape, 'pitted with craters and with empty seas'. Here 'moonland' is again at the centre 'tortured pocked and grey', nearness kills enchantment to reveal a 'searing column of steam from ash', such naked power is incomprehensible. Except, that is, as a parable of self, a myth - matching 'fire at my centre, burning since my birth/under the pleasant flesh'. In 'Discourse from the Deck', a section unaccountably excluded from the final draft, Gunn comes to accept both the fragility of these naked, vulnerable bathers and, more surprisingly, those 'predators and punks' who would present violence to them, cool stream and geyser, love and vengeance. The poet strives to contain, to control both tendencies within himself, just as America, similarly torn, appears

'As the globe turns, from high in outer space,
One great brave luminous green-gold meeting place,'³⁹⁶

The synthesis of the final section, 'The Bath House', is thus prepared for. Again at night, Gunn plunges into orgy, dope and heat, as couplets splinter into strange new patterns. 'Uneasy change' leads him back to 'weight of a darker earlier air', through the birth of the stars, through the 'age of reptiles', through, as in 'Being Born', his own caesarian birth (from mother, from earth). Like 'The Goddess' the poet surfaces through water. He meets his fellow dreamers. They move in like scavengers, they 'tear and twine' away the old existential, narcissistic self, they reveal his degradation - 'I am raw meat' - and yet through it apotheosis, release - 'I am a god'. As in Moly, after the Fall comes the Redemption, godhead.

'Three Songs' bring such mythologising brusquely back to earth. Short, sharp exercises in creating a persona - baby ripped into life, hitch-hiker escaping from home, derelict recapturing it through alcohol³⁹⁷ - they also gather together the major themes of Part I ~~together~~: inner and outer, a return to the nurturing earth, 'things are different inside Mother'. Those poems not reprinted from Songbook³⁹⁸ are also 'improvisations/inside a tune, like Positives celebrations of the everyday, A New York cowboy, Rita 'turning a trick' for her pimp, Encolpius in turn cat, lady and suburban man, dreaming gangbangs are all evoked, not judged. Most extraordinary is 'The Spell', a return to folklore. A 'lucky son', Gunn recites the magic formula 'that joins', walks in the sacred wood. Dispersing luck, he rediscovers moly, 'the mind's reward/a life-gutted to gold', burning into sunlight.³⁹⁹

Part 2 of Jack Straw's Castle discovers its own treasures. 'The Plunge' makes 'diving down 'a rope of bubbles' metaphor.(as in 'The Bathhouse') for rebirth through sexual orgy.-'a gliding/a moving with'.- Gunn resurfacing, godlike, to 'eat the air'. 'Bringing to Light' digs still deeper, brings back fragments of 'ancient cities', prisons, lost memories. Such roots twine ever downward, 'Babel reversed', to the centre, 'the debris of sorcery'. Achilles merges with his enemy Achelous, mother melts into lover, the heart of matter.-

'one figure that covers its face
nameless and inescapable'⁴⁰⁰.

This image is clearly sexual - 'the last the/first cavern, dark and moist' - its foundations earth, still separating. Close observation again yields treasure in 'Thomas Bewick': like the misanthropos he 'loses himself in detail'...reverts to an earlier self', like Odysseus he reaches for a 'milky flower', and process leads to permanence, 'The History of British Birds'.⁴⁰¹ 'Wrestling' evokes 'the way we acquire knowledge intuitively (as,for example an animal does)',⁴⁰² a direct study of the creation of myth - 'continuous discourse/of angels'. Narratives of 'sun and moon/fire and beginnings' underlie language - and Gunn's later poetry - as on a 'palimpsest', a secret, half-obscured message, again brought by an angel, for

'still, like a high
window you never noticed
it lets in light'⁴⁰³.

Such 'luminous discourse' continues into three evocations, through myth, of

festival. 'The Outdoor Concert' leads on from 'The Fair in the Woods', such fragile community still secret, 'at the edge/of the understanding', the dust of mortality seemingly disconcerted 'as if it will never settle'. Dust is magically connected with music, with fog into a 'luminous intersection/spread at the centre', a spider metamorphosised into its own web, reality in the process of becoming myth-

'a god existing
only in its creation'⁴⁰⁴.

'Saturnalia', in turn, leads on from 'The Bath House' - godhead through sexual orgy - the Roman festival of fertility turned to a celebration of 'Gay Lib'⁴⁰⁵, sexual force (as in 'The Goddess') 'still rising still reshaping'. 'Outlaws in majority' become as one, a 'muscled flood' of flesh, merging into savage unity,

'the whole body pulses
like an erection, blood
in the head and furious
with tenderness'⁴⁰⁶,

man and community conflated. At such extreme experience, Gunn turns, as ever, to classical myth, each separate, sharpened sense 'a zone of Eros'. 'Faustus Triumphant' again brings myth up to date, restores the contemporary to the eternal,⁴⁰⁷ a 'speed junky' celebrating the linked orgy of methedrine, spreading through his body like a flame. He shares Faustus's pact with the devil - 'I think there was a bargain made' - his self-deception - 'nor is Nature a lawyer' - that such pleasures must not be paid for, and yet (sharing the ambivalence of the original myth, of Gunn's attitude to drugs) such insights are gloried in, the sunlight of Moly spread inward, forbidden pleasures which lead to death yet illuminate it;

'I shall rejoice to
enter into him

Father
Nature, the Great Flame'⁴⁰⁸.

'Jack Straw's Castle' itself is framed by two poems that explore such loss, such need further. 'Dolly' seems to comment back on Faustus, 'he's out to end his choices/for good and doesn't realize it', and yet sympathises rather than judges, the sweat of (self?) recognition, a baffled love for whatever is crippled, lacks freedom. 'An Amorous Debate' only dissolves into full orgy when 'Leather Kid' accidentally, Narcissus like, kisses himself. Only then does animal turn fully

to man, the 'hide under hide' lose the 'obduracy of leather', Mars surrender fully to Venus. 'Fleshly' lays the 'pale river of her body' onto his, they melt together

'like the way the Saone
joins the Rhone at Lyon'⁴⁰⁹.

'Jack Straw's Castle' erects such progress - the failure to give oneself transformed into the harmony of flesh - into a potent legend. Jack Straw is a representative⁴¹⁰ spirit who unites poet and reader in his self-doubt, last and most vulnerable of Gunn's doppelgangers, both 'the haunting spirit and the haunted man'⁴¹¹.

The poem starts from 'Human Condition' - man as a castle, made separate by the fog of his individuality - to come to terms with his own insignificance, 'a man of no account/visited only by visions'. Section I watches this from outside, Jack Straw besieged in his castle - loneliness, fear, mortality - the one thing fully alive his breath in cold air, 'a beautiful fern'. Sunlight has yielded to rain, illumination to the 'burning smell' of self-immolation - Odysseus, Faustus. - and, in section 2, man has again regressed to pig, to gross sexuality. Jack Straw relapses into dream, acid flashback, prophetic vision (from which the poem is never to fully release him). Section 3 first evokes the cosiness of home - the sunlit 'square of floor', kittens equally snug in their box, 'a perfect fit' - and then undermines it, rooms which open into darkness and haunt his subconscious -

'First as thin smoky lines, ghost of a door
Or lintel that develops like a print
Darkening into full embodiment'⁴¹² -

their denizens similarly insubstantial, 'there always was too much of the phantom to them'. Paranoia rolls in like fog: does such twisted reality suddenly emerge, like the mushrooms - subterranean, nocturnal - discovered in 'Bringing to Light', or has it been there all the time, unrecognised, 'hiding here all day?'.

The rest of the poem is gouged on the horns of this dilemma, gouged but finally (miraculously) thrown clear. In section 4, 'sponsors' of such nightmare appear, Charles Manson as exemplar of the stoned violence that disfigured hippy visions like Moly, the Furies as classical avengers of such crimes of kinship, the dismembering of community. - their 'mad/puppetry heads a metamorphosis of the boxed kittens of 3 - the Gorgon Medusa their answer to Manson, turning all to stone. Perhaps Jack Straw is cool enough to 'outstare her'. Section 5 shows otherwise,

Medusa awaits, 'dazzle' of sunlight again transmuted into fire - 'hair burning/in its own gold' - stunned angel who presents not moly but the heart of darkness, 'the source of everything ... the same as nothing'. Jack is burnt up by such orgy, such knowledge; he sinks back into darkness, vacancy, 'my foundations', back to the cellars of 'Bringing to Light'⁴¹³. The community of 'The Bath House' is reversed, from adventurous to sinister, from illumination to degradation -

'... there's a sound about me of many breathing
Light slap of foot on stone and rustle of body
Against body and stone'⁴¹⁴.

'Nothing is visible' except a stone block, sticky with sacrificial blood, as gruesomely everyday as that 'glossy chipped surface' in 'No Speech from the Scaffold'. Jack's role is immaterial - priest and victim merely 'two limbs of the same body' - for this is 'the seat of needs', a symbolic cleansing sacrifice at the very root of myth, 'ritual and ceremony' without which humanity would 'tear apart the life that feeds' it. Indeed Jack becomes, in imagination, all three ritual possibilities- victim, priest and congregation; tortured, torturer and voyeur -

'I am the man on the rack.
I am the man who puts the man on the rack.
I am the man who watches the man who puts the man on the rack'⁴¹⁵.

Section 8 brings light but not enlightenment, the chamber once more 'false and quiet', this vision fled like a movie, 'a thought up film/which suddenly ceases'. Jack is even more securely trapped in 'Little Ease', his castle of bone, 'petrified at my centre'. His quest for meaning - the misanthropos' 'long solitude', the sad captains' doomed heroism - succumbs to sad circularity, 'I spin like a solitary star'.

Of all people, it is Charles Manson who brings release, his taunt that such dreams reveal hidden, forbidden desires - 'death-sweat or lust-sweat', his literal slaughters' - self-defeating. 'Something inside my head turns over', solitude ends itself, for such dreams presuppose, and reflect, an external reality,

'For if I brought all this stuff inside
There must be an outside to bring it from'⁴¹⁶.

Such thought is 'a staircase leading upward', towards the rain that opened section I (cleansing now), Manson banished 'clean gone'. In section 10, Jack wakes from such dreams - having sleepwalked from bed to kitchen-chair - to more fully

encounter 'my own spectre', cold but unafraid, 'unshivering'. Self becomes the castle that originally imprisoned it (grown into its own metaphor), the search for identity is thus an ascent up 'a flight of/flint steps that leads nowhere', one's own awareness a ruin set in air that plummets down to 'broken slabs', sunlight

'glinting over bone-chips which must
at one time have been castle',⁴¹⁷.

The final section at last exorcises such demons. Jack is back safely 'in the kitchen with a beer', the dungeon escaped but unsettling - 'what laid these stones' - self absorption at last fragmented because unearthed (literally) in nightmare.

'The castle is here, but not snug any more,
I'm loose, I rattle in its hollow core',⁴¹⁸.

Hurricane quietens to rain, dream to dreamless sleep, self to otherness. 'Mere contact is sufficient touch', and - as earlier in 'Touch' - Jack wakes to encounter a naked (male) lover, no longer phantom but tangible, with 'sweet faint sweat'. Love is 'a hinge, it separates, but not too much', it brings dawn after real and metaphorical darkness, it brings reality out of dream, makes reality a dream:

'- Thick sweating flesh against which I lie curled -
With dreams like this, Jack's ready for the world',⁴¹⁹.

If Moly sought escape from the 'nightmare of beasthood', 'Jack Straw's Castle' seeks instead to transcend it, yet not abandon such carnality. Self-immolation (as in section 5) is a means to community, not the reverse. Whatever the castle here symbolises - self-concern, civilisation, the waking world - freedom comes from outside it. Jack and his lover, 'bare and close/facing apart, but leaning ass to ass', escape it, again, for the air - 'calm and cool/as the green water of a swimming pool' - the fleshly transmutations, through myth, of 'The Geysers'.

Part 3 of Jack Straw's Castle attempts to come to terms with the poet's own particular roots - the London childhood of Positives, hippy experiments in San Francisco, - the relation between man and Nature redeeming the nature of loss⁴²⁰. In 'Autobiography', Gunn searches for 'the sniff of the real', a 'potent air' first encountered at seventeen, which can counteract such loss, a memory of 'inclusion'. 'Hampstead: the Horse Chestnut Trees' further probes memory, its falsifications -

'Forms remain, not the life
of detail or hue',⁴²¹.

Twin trees are memorials of Gunn and brother Ander, but Spring, 'smell of leaf in May', spreads forgetfulness, wood hearts 'preserve nothing'. Maturity brings not enlightenment but stagnation, the beckoning 'sullen marsh' of adult limit, time

'hardening tender green
to insensate lumber',⁴²².

The same progression, 'thick dazzle of bloom' to 'gnarled sleep', is traced in 'The Cherry Tree', the 'push of creation' rising up from hidden roots into life

'from the centre, to
bring what is not
from what is ...',⁴²³.

This results in miracle, 'a coat of babies', but caring ceases with loss: memory again fails, metamorphosis reverses itself, 'she knows nothing about babies'. Gunn traces carefully such 'wreckages of trust', the emotional vengeance of 'The Roadmap' - a 'hardened innocence',⁴²⁴ - the demolition of the hippy dream in 'The Idea of Trust'. Jim is as unremarkable as a lilac bush, but 'wild lilac/chokes the garden', he violates the privacy of those supposedly beyond it, exposes communal tolerance as an 'intimate conspiracy'. 'Behind the Mirror' seeks new answers. Gunn encounters the other only to find it is self, a mirror image -

'I and the reflected self seemed identical twins
alike yet separate, two flowers from the same plant',⁴²⁵ -

the myth of Narcissus an attempt to drown self away, to escape 'deep behind the mirror'. He seeks a unity of water and earth - 'soft dark wave of soil' - these twin petals of light joined in moly, 'one flower/one waxy star, giving perfume, unreflecting'. Gunn seeks an end to thought, an end to the analysis of mirrors.

Jack Straw's Castle ends by attempting a synthesis of Nature and myth. In 'Mandrakes' flowers are themselves gods, withdrawn 'like the Picts/into fireside tales and rumour' but still potent, sinister - 'we can outwait you'. Conversely, the dog in 'Yoko' waits all day for his master, a man for his God - 'my leader looks on and expresses his approval' - released to explore the sensual delights of Nature, autumn in July. Such comfort is mutual, 'I stand with you braced against the wind'. In 'The Release', the poet himself becomes God, reassembling the world in his mind, recreating a man, but releasing him back to self, freedom -

'I must return to him as he was
a shimmering planet sheathed in its own air',⁴²⁶.

Jack Straw's Castle is part of a wider reconsideration by Gunn of his past, the lost cellars of his youth. The Missed Beat⁴²⁷ resurrects seven earlier poems, diamonds from the rough, a recent bibliography⁴²⁸ brings to light juvenilia and an essay 'My Life up to Now', while Worlds unearths 'My Suburban Muse', The Prelude reset in Hampstead⁴²⁹. Poems like 'Adolescence' and 'Last Days in Teddington' are 'modest evocative fragments',⁴³⁰ that reveal a semi-rural childhood far removed from the gritty realities of Positives. Most revealing of all is 'My Cambridge', Gunn describing early friends and influences, most importantly the actor Tony White. The poet had already experienced, in France, 'a revelation of physical and spiritual freedom' which he erected into a guiding myth, a kind of Stendhalian pose;

'Everyone plays a part, whether he knows it or not, so he might as well deliberately design a part, or a series of parts, for himself',⁴³¹

Man is left somewhere between undefined self and chosen part, the unachieved and the achieved. White helped Gunn develop this through existentialism, his own dramatic pose 'a kind of athletic defiance of the Gods'. It is to the memory of Tony White that Jack Straw's Castle is dedicated: he died unknown and in penury,

'He dropped out, coolly and deliberately, from the life of applause, having come to see how the need for it complicates one's existence',⁴³²

Indeed, the closing poem here is an elegy - for the poet's aunt in Kent⁴³³, for White and for Gunn himself. Part I touchingly evokes the old woman in terms of her garden - tightly crammed against weeds, bergamot sweating like a lover, 'fiercely aflame' like sunlight, like moly. Nevertheless, autumn and dissolution beckon: she is 'too old now to/dig', fresh green boughs are redundant, nasturtium is 'rusted'. Gunn 'can't accept' such dispersal into dust, flesh disintegrating into 'an indiscriminate mulch, a/humus of no colour'. Part 2 moves from aunt evoked to aunt remembered, Kent to Monterey, August to 'October and high fog'. Flesh is reborn from such compost - the Garden of the Gods - into blooms of moly, 'firm/and everlasting petals'. The song 'Let it Be' becomes a profound message,⁴³⁴ the dead dispersed among the community of the living, 'one great garden which/is always here', an Elizabethan classicalism in which 'Shee is found, shee is ever faire'. Gunn has moved from using myth to define close personal restraints to, through it, evoking life and society: developing a personal clarity, the reader's 'feeling of contact with an honest man who will never lie to me',⁴³⁵

Notes.

1. Jack Straw's Castle, 1976, p 25.
2. 'Poet to Poet' - Ben Jonson, ed. Thom Gunn, Harmondsworth 1974, p 13.
3. Alan Bold, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, Edinburgh 1976, p 25.
4. Ben Jonson p 18.
5. Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, p 8.
6. Worlds, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Harmondsworth 1974, p 58. In a short essay 'My Suburban Muse', Gunn writes entertainingly about his beginnings as a poet, a palliative against the hermetic nature of much of his early work, self-consciously clever.
7. Ibid, p 59.
8. 'The Furies', Chequer 2 (May 1953) pp 14-5.
 'Ralphs Dream', London Magazine II (January 1955) pp 48-51.
 It is a great pity that nothing else of this fascinating, if naive, project has so far reached print - if complete it would undoubtedly have been Gunn's longest poem, and a source of great insight into his early work, some of which is notoriously unclear.
9. The Furies, p 10.
10. Ralph's Dream, p 50.
11. Ralph's Dream, p 49.
12. 'Earthborn', London Magazine I, February 1954, p 64.
13. 'Palinode', London Magazine I, May 1954, pp 25-6.
14. See 'A Plan of Self Subjection', The Sense of Movement 1957, p 20, 'Coriolanus, whom I most admire'.
15. 'Terms', Spectator, 2 April 1954, p 398.
16. Fighting Terms, Swinford (Fantasy Press) 1954; revised ed. New York (Hawks Well Press) 1958; further revised ed. London (Faber) 1962.
 I will refer mainly to the 1962 revision, as this is the most accessible, noting any major emendations from the original. For a detailed list of the textual changes see John Fuller, 'Thom Gunn', Review I (April/May 1962) p 29-34, esp. the appendix. See also my own unpublished M.A. thesis, 'The Poetry of Thom Gunn', Birmingham 1975, p 43-44.
17. Anon., Times Literary Supplement, 2 April 1954, p 218, reviewing Gunn's pamphlet 'Poems' (Fantasy Poets, No 16) Oxford 1953, all reprinted in Fighting Terms.
18. Peter Dale, Agenda 2 (May-June 1962), pp 21-5.

19. 'The Poetry of Thom Gunn' pp 36-9.
20. Ian Hamilton, 'Four Conversations', London Magazine IV (1964), pp 64-70.
21. Let the Poet Choose, London 1973, ed. J. Gibson, p 69.
22. Fighting Terms (1962 revision), p 9.
23. Ibid, p 16.
24. Ibid, p 18.
25. Ibid, p 22.
26. Ibid, p 24.
27. John Fuller, 'Thom Gunn' - the essay, without the appendix, was reprinted in The Modern Poet, ed. Ian Hamilton, London 1965.
28. Fighting Terms, p 20. The 1954 edition keeps this line unaltered as the refrain throughout.
29. Fighting Terms, Swinford 1954 p 17. - This poem was omitted from the 1962 revision, presumably because it was too adolescent and brutal.
30. Fighting Terms (1962 revision), p 15.
31. When this poem first appeared - in the Cambridge magazine Delta - it was dedicated to the playwright John Whiting, whose drama Saints Day was published in 1949 and performed in Cambridge in 1952, a year before Gunn's poem was printed in Delta. The play ends with its heroes, two poets and and a painter, walking out with their executioners to meet death, and is presented in a naturalistic, almost sleazy way. If this mysterious poem takes this incident as its basis, it certainly contains a measure of irony.
32. 'Inside the Moon', (originally entitled 'Light Sleeping') Poetry Now 1956 pp 80-81.
33. Fighting Terms Swinford 1954 pp 35-6 - omitted from the 1962 revision, presumably because, though interesting, the poem is too abstract.
34. Fighting Terms 1962, p 36.
35. See 'The Poetry of Thom Gunn', pp 13-15.
36. Fighting Terms 1962, p 29; the 'greater counterpart' is, of course, King Lear, supposedly based on the Paphlagonian King who appears towards the end of Sidney's Arcadia.
37. Fighting Terms 1962, p 27 - the 1954 original is clearer here, the final line reading 'squandering with so little left to spend'.
38. Edith Piaf's famous song 'Je ne regrette rien'; the general tenor of Sartre's form of existentialism.

39. The Sense of Movement, London (Faber) 1957.
40. Terry Eagleton, 'Myth and History in Recent Poetry', British Poetry since 1960, ed M.Schmidt and G.Lindop, Oxford 1972, p 236.
41. Ibid p 236.
42. See Ian Hamilton, 'The Making of the Movement', A Poetry Chronicle, London 1973, pp18-23, a typically tart account, backed up by his interview with Gunn in London Magazine, n.s. Vol.4, No.8, Nov.1964, pp64-70, especially the poet's comment that 'the big joke about the Movement was that none of the people had ever met each other and certainly never subscribed to anything like a programme...there were a few chance resemblances, but they were pretty chance'.
43. Fighting Terms p 38.
44. The Sense of Movement p II.
45. Ibid p I2.
46. Ibid p I2.
47. Ibid p 30.
48. Ibid p 20.
49. Adolphe is presumably taken from Constant's novel of the same name, Fabrice from Stendhal's La Chartreuse de Palma.
50. The Sense of Movement p 22.
51. Compare, say, Chaucer's The Monks Tale ll. I-4, ed. W.Skeat, Oxford 1912 (Complete Works p 531) for a succinct description of this tragic fall -
 'I wol biwayle in maner of Tragedie
 The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree,
 And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
 To bringe hem out of hir adversitee'.
52. The Sense of Movement p 27.
53. Ibid p 38.
54. Ibid p 40.
55. Ibid p 43.
56. George Macdonald, At the Back of the North Wind, London 1871.
57. The Sense of Movement p I5.
58. W.B.Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium', Collected Poems 1950. p 217.
59. The Sense of Movement p 52.

60. See Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, ed. Maria Leach, 1972 (One Volume edition) p 912-13. The cat, the sole inheritance bequeathed to a poor youth, 'beguiles a giant with conversation and tales all night at his own castle gate; at sunrise the giant bursts ... and the cat takes over the giant's sumptuous castle for his master'.
61. See Funk and Wagnall p II70
62. The Sense of Movement p 35.
63. This was adapted into the title of George Melly's Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain, Harmondsworth 1970, the most penetrating account of this theme, the myths perpetuated through pop, jazz and rock n' roll.
64. The Sense of Movement p 33. This celebration of modern city life owes much, of course, to Baudelaire, as does the later 'A Map of the City'.
65. Henry James, The Turn of the Screw. The text of the first edition, which appeared in 1898 (rather than the over-revised text of the 1907-9 New York collected edition) is reprinted in The Turn of the Screw and other stories, ed. S.Gorley Putt, Harmondsworth 1969. Gunn draws on James' deliberate ambiguity, are the ghosts real or the figments of the governess's imagination
66. The Sense of Movement p 49. Cf the meadow of 'Puss in Boots to the Giant'.
67. Ibid p 60. Cf. Neil Powell's fine study Carpenters of Light, Manchester 1979; the chapter 'Thom Gunn: A Pierglass for Poets' both derives its title from this poem and describes it well - 'we feel the poem closing in around us, revealing itself cautiously and exactly' (p 38).
68. Ibid p 62.
69. Martin Dodsworth, 'Thom Gunn', The Survival of Poetry (also) ed Dodsworth, 1970 p 206, quoting Emmanuel Mounier, Introduction aux Existentialismes, Paris 1947, p 40 (the quotation takes on added interest through its chance allusion to classical philosophy) - 'this conception of existence as forward looking is opposed by Heidegger to inertia, to the totally determined nature of classical existents, of substance, or at least of the degraded image which is often offered in its place'.
70. The Sense of Movement p 56.
71. Ibid p 58.
72. See Dodsworth p 207, again quoting Mounier, p 40 - 'the constitution of a man made in order that he should choose can only be that of a being who takes risks ... if you were sure, replies Kirkegaard, you would not be exactly engaged in an action of an eternal order, you would be making a profitable speculation'.
73. The Sense of Movement p 14.

74. Alan Bold, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes p 26.
75. My Sad Captains, 1961 p 20.
76. Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique, Paris 1943, transl. by Hazel Barnes as Being and Nothingness (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, London 1957), introduction by Mary Warnock.
77. Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique de la raison dialectique. Paris 1960.
78. L'etre et le neant pp310-364, Barnes pp259-65, Cf Dodsworth p 206.
79. See, for example, Barnes p 510, 'one may recall ... the innumerable host of meanings which are independent of my choice and which I discover if I live in a city'.
80. See, particularly, the section 'Le Corps'; 'the flesh is the pure contingency of presence' (Barnes p 343).
81. The Sense of Movement p 28. Neil Powell has savaged this poem for its unreality, Carpenters of Light p 34, but all of Gunn's early poems are the same, emblems rather than simple reports.
82. Ibid p 29. This nightmare vision is deepened in 'Elegy on the Dust', resolved in 'The Garden of the Gods'.
83. Barnes p 400, typical of Sartre's excited (though hardly exciting) language, even in translation.
84. The Sense of Movement p 37.
85. Mary Warnock, introduction to Being and Nothingness, transl. Barnes, 1969 ed. p xvii.
86. 'Thom Gunn writes', Poetry Book Society Bulletin 54 (September 1967). Cf Frederick Grubb's 'Thom Gunn, the Poet as Peacetime Conscript' in A Vision of Reality 1965 pp202-213, which emphasises the same heritage.
87. See the cover of the gramophone record Thom Gunn reading On the Move (Marvell Press) Hesse 1962, in which Gunn, propped against a Californian road sign, waits to hitch a ride looking much like the hoodlum in Market at Turk'. Int. Peter Abramowitsch's photographs for the anthology Worlds, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Harmondsworth 1974 pp 60, 63-73 the motorcycle boots, jeans and tatoos remain, Gunn's beard, long hair and the rock music posters in his apartment testimony to the new enthusiasms of Moly. It is interesting to compare the photographs, in the same volume, of Seamus Heaney - with his family in rural Ireland, walking, fishing, being searched by a soldier - and Ted Hughes, who chooses not himself but the brooding Yorkshire landscape. Again significantly, photographs of Geoffrey Hill (like readings by him) are few and uncomfortable.
88. See Bold p 17.

89. The Sense of Movement p 18.
90. Gunn was taught by Winters at Stanford, and told Ian Hamilton that 'I found him a very impressive man and I spent about the first three months arguing with him all the time. I think he has been good for me in many ways'. It was Cat Winters' seminar class that Gunn, Donald Hall and Alan Stephens began their experiments with syllabics, recounted by Winters in Forms of Discovery Denver 1967 (though, paradoxically, he is sceptical about the results).
91. John Press took this as the title of his sensitive study of post-war English verse, Rule and Energy, 1963, dealing, among others, with Gunn himself (pp 191-201).
92. The Sense of Movement p 44.
93. Ibid p 47. Cf the 'hard ornaments' of 'In Praise of Cities', the 'dandy's affectation' of 'The Beaters'.
94. Market and Turk are two streets in San Francisco. Bold puts the case against this poem with what is either perception or crassness (I lean towards the latter) but there is a certain point to his diatribe - 'He has a knife which will presumably be used (once Gunn has done with the subject) on the human flesh of another human being' (Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes p 30).
95. The Sense of Movement p 50.
96. Cf 'Jesus and his Mother' for the same situation between mother and child, 'You, who had been hers, were not any more'.
97. The Sense of Movement p 48. The ritual violence of Shakespeare's play, even though 'no golden hairs are there, no bleeding count', continues into the following poem, 'The Separation' (a variant on the same theme of 'obstacles to love') with its chilling final line 'what dead charge do I pull upon my breast'.
98. Neil Powell argues that this unnamed novel is Stendhal's Le Rouge et le Noir Paris 1830 (Carpenters of Light p 37).
99. The Sense of Movement p 24.
100. Ibid p 51.
101. Ibid p 51.
102. Dodsworth p 199.
103. The Sense of Movement p 17.
104. John Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Poetical Works ed. H.W.Garrod, Oxford 1956, pp 209-10. Myth and history are deliberately confused - 'what men or gods are these.
105. See notes 2-4.

- I06. My Sad Captains London (Faber) 1961.
- I07. Anthony Thwaite, Spectator, 1 September 1961, p 298.
- I08. Al Alvarez, Observer, 10 September 1961, p 24.
- I09. A.E.Dyson, Critical Quarterly III (Winter 1961) p 379.
- I10. Frank Kermode, New Statesman, 6 October 1961, pp 479-80.
- I11. Pierre Corneille, Cinna (first performed 1641) - 'I am this and desire to be it'. The play describes a tyrant who pardons those who plot against him.
- I12. Troilus and Cressida Act III Scene 2. Shakespeare's play also directly influenced 'The Wound'. Here Troilus complains to Cressida about the 'monstruosity in love', an interest in will and limit shared by Gunn.
- I13. The poem's title is also that of Book XI of the Odyssey, in which Tiresias is summoned to make his prophecies.
- I14. My Sad Captains p 26. Cf the redcoat soldier's 'bloody wound'. another discriminate gift, in 'Incident on a Journey'.
- I15. Cf. Rieu's translation (Harmondsworth 1946, p 174) 'as for your own end, Death will come to you out of the sea, Death in its gentlest guise'. Tennyson's fine poem 'Ulysses' also describes this second odyssey into death and the dark (Poems and Plays ed Warren, 1965 pp 89-90).
- I16. My Sad Captains p 26.
- I17. Cf. 'I have have reached a time when words no longer help' and the climb to new mountains of experience in 'For a Birthday'.
- I18. My Sad Captains p 16. Cf the doppelganger of 'The Secret Sharer', the similar decaying landscape of earlier poems like 'Looking Glass' or 'In Praise of Cities'. Significantly, this is the only of Gunn's poems to be included in George Macbeth's anthology The Penguin Book of Sick Verse, Harmondsworth 1963 (though Gunn can chill as effectively as any post-war poet).
- I19. Ibid p 18.
- I20. Ibid p 19. Circularity recurs, sleeplessness transformed into nightmare.
- I21. Ibid p 13. The persecutor of the Christians, Saul, became their foremost evangelist through a divine revelation on the road to Damascus, Acts of the Apostles Chapter 9. Ananias restored his sight and converted him.
- I22. Cf. the false comfort of 'The Book of the Dead'.
- I23. My Sad Captains p 14.
- I24. Being and Nothingness (transl. Barnes) p 11, 21. In Sartre's system, nothingness separates consciousness from the world of things. Boldt (p 37) draws a comparison with Rochester's ~~is~~ 'Upon Nothing'.

- I25. My Sad Captains p 15.
- I26. Cf. the plants of 'The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of his Death' which similarly 'multiply in ignorance'. 'Ignorance' is the opposite of hard-won human consciousness.
- I27. My Sad Captains p 15. The whole poem is a startling fusion, unique to Gunn, of passion and abstract philosophy.
- I28. Cf. 'Carnal Knowledge', 'Lofty in the Palais de Dance'. The poem was originally entitled 'With Good Humour' Paris Review 25 (Summer 1961) p 52.
- I29. For a full account of the 1944 bomb plot see Constantine Fitzgibbon, To Kill Hitler, London 1972. Brutus, earlier described in 'Vox Humana', was the archetype of the judicial murder of a tyrant - Julius Caesar - but there may be an ironic contrast between Stauffenberg, 'honour personified', and Brutus, Antony's 'honourable man' (Julius Caesar Act III, Scene II).
- I30. My Sad Captains p 33.
- I31. Ibid p 22.
- I32. Ibid p 27. Gunn himself glosses both 'byrnies' and 'nicker' in the 'Acknowledgments', this use of Anglo-Saxon suggesting that the 'heroes' are Saxon invaders of Britain in the process of making a nation.
- I33. Ibid p 28.
- I34. Ibid p 32. This interest in natural metamorphosis is to be a keynote of later poems, based on a new delicacy of description.
- I35. Ibid p 32.
- I36. This epigram, together with 'Readings in French' and two uncollected stanzas on Saint-Beuve and Stendhal, originally appeared as 'Notes on the French', Critical Quarterly I (Autumn 1959) p 207. Only Sartre and Flaubert survive Gunn's disdain, but this could be a revulsion against the poet's own heroes while living in Paris, and attempting to write a Proustian novel when not working on the Metro, before he went to Cambridge. (Bold p 9).
- I37. Thom Gunn reading On the Move. See note 87.
- I38. My Sad Captains p 25.
- I39. Thom Gunn reading On the Move, sleeve note.
- I40. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, New York 1941. Cf. Kenneth Koch's poem 'Fresh Air', The New American Poetry, ed. Donald Allen, 1960 pp 229-236.
- I41. See Roy Fuller's lecture on syllabics in Owls and Artificers, 1971. Also see Powell p 41-2 for a spoof on Gunn's use of the form by Alan Stephens. (who experimented in this form himself with Gunn and Donald Hall at Stanford).

- I42. For an interesting discussion of Gunn's syllabic verse see Powell pp39-44.
- I43. The poem was originally titled 'Waking in a Newly Built House, Oakland', in Listen II 4, Spring 1956, pp2-3, a clearer statement of geographical displacement (a subsequent pamphlet was indeed entitled A Geography).
- I44. Powell p 41.
- I45. My Sad Captains p 37.
- I46. The Sense of Movement p 55.
- I47. First seen in 'The Byrnies' and 'The Value of Gold', later extended into a counterpart of myth itself in Moly, most beautifully the poem 'Sunlight'.
- I48. My Sad Captains p 43. This poem was originally published as 'Bonheur - effects of mescaline', and its present title, French for 'The Test' again seems to refer to the 'Acid Tests' of the time, carried out in California in the middle 1960s, when LSD was still legal. The use of mescaline is discussed by Simone de Beauvoir in The Prime of Life, describing Sartre's experiments with the drug shortly before writing La Nausée, an earlier case of existentialism yielding to psychedelics. Gunn is to expand these insights in Moly. Incidentally, I sometimes wonder how many of those critics who so glibly discuss Gunn's use of psychedelic drugs have actually taken LSD themselves -
- I49. My Sad Captains p 43.
- I50. Dodsworth (p 213-4) defines 'immanence' as 'the tree's quality of fulfilling or having fulfilled intrinsic purposes which do not connect with our world at all' (p 213), 'rosy' because also salutary, promising a new consciousness. Submission, the definition of 'tone', and definition, the submission to the tree's 'immanence', are brought together in 'the quality of action, of guiding, of swaying, the reader' (p 214) which informs Gunn's best poetry.
- I51. My Sad Captains p 38.
- I52. My Sad Captains p 48.
- I53. Compare the man in the cabin controlling the machine, skull directing an 'enormous throbbing body', with 'L'Epreuve', the poet directing the 'thick and singular spy' of his unconscious body from the 'hovering planet' of his conscious mind. Once again, limits lead to fullness.
- I54. My Sad Captains p 42.
- I55. My Sad Captains p 50. Cf 'The Byrnies' or even the motorcyclists of 'On the Move', noble savages, progenitors and ancestors.
- I56. Rastignac is taken from Balzac's Comedie Humaine, where he appears intermittently, his coming to maturity described in Pere Goriot (Paris 1834).

- I57. My Sad Captains p 45.
- I58. The quotation marks here indicate that this is the tattooist's working name, both slightly pathetic and yet a bold piece of self-advertisement.
- I59. My Sad Captains p 51.
- I60. My Sad Captains p 51. Cf Antony and Cleopatra Act III, Scene xiii, 183-5.
 'Let's have one other gaudy night: call to me
 All my sad captains, fill our bowls: once more
 Let's mock the midnight bell'.
 'Sad' means 'steadfast' as well as 'melancholy' and these two meanings interact. This poem is obviously important to Gunn - it is the first after which he names a whole collection - and has been the cause of great critical argument; A.E.Dyson found it 'equal(to)anything he has given us before' and 'very moving', Critical Quarterly III 4, Winter 1961, p 379, whereas Neil Powell finds it 'ill-judged' (p 59) prosaic, its train of thought petering out half way, and yet also describes it as 'one of Gunn's most successful poems' (p 42)!
- I61. Letter by Gunn, quoted Bold p 44.
- I62. Positives, London (Faber) 1966, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 1966, Verses by Thom Gunn, photographs by Ander Gunn. This title is both a pun on photographic negatives, here reversed through poetry, and testimony to a newly 'positive' approach by Gunn to the unheroic.
- I63. Cyril Connolly, Sunday Times, 27 November 1966, p 53.
- I64. Cf. an earlier collaboration between poet and photographer, B.S.Johnson and Julia Oman, Street Children, London 1964. Johnson's preface is illuminating
 'This book is about children growing up ... learning about the feel and appearance of physical textures ... and then, having accepted their surroundings, learning that relationships with other children, with other people are what matters most ... the text attempts to compliment the visual, adding the dimension of time to the static moment fixed by the camera'.
Street Children is more limited than Positives, confined to children and urban squalor, though it is more experimental, speeches placed on the page to coincide with their makers, thought divided typographically into spoken, conscious and subconscious. It may well have influenced the later project.
- I65. William Hunt, in Poetry Review III, March 1968, pp405-7.
- I66. Gunn expressed his admiration of this poet direct in 'William Carlos Williams', Encounter XXV (July 1965) pp67-74, praising both his 'love for the external world' and his rejection of the 'rituals of the past'. Gunn himself was to develop the first but redefine, rather than destroy, the second. Gunn's critical work follows a markedly similar course to his

poetry, from the hard-line early reviews for the London Magazine and the Spectator to the more inclusive tolerance of work for Poetry Chicago and The Yale Review, an Englishman in America, to longer, more unified, accounts of favourite writers, 'positive' indeed. As well as Williams, Gunn has written well on Gary Snyder, his work an 'art of discovery' in itself, a 'poetry of feeling exquisitely defined by its objects' (Listener, 2 May 1968 p 577), the 'plain style' of Fulke Greville, and the ballad tradition located both in modern pop music and the poetry of Thomas Hardy - a rich native source which, like the classical tradition, has been constantly drawn on as a 'means of renewal' (Agenda X, Summer 1972, p32). See also 'The Poetry of Thom Gunn' p21-5.

- I67. Positives p 6. The water is both cooling in the cold air and cooling the warm young body, the 'tepid' verse criticised by the Times Literary Supplement (19 January 1967, p 48) but so integral to the whole collection. Like many poems in Positives there is no concluding full-stop, the verse instead set in a continuing, and continuous, present, the preserve of legend.
- I68. Cf 'The Book of the Dead' for the same kind of laboured conceit.
- I69. Positives p 10.
- I70. Positives p 10. The end of Positives is itself a 'painful conclusion'.
- I71. Positives p 12.
- I72. Positives p 16.
- I73. Positives p 18. If these 'black hairy legs' belong to the bees, the analogy is strained, if they belong to the girls it reduces the poem to farce.
- I74. Positives p 20. Another heroic gesture, again part of 'fighting terms'.
- I75. Positives p 22. Cf. 'At the Centre', itself one of the central poems of Moly.
- I76. This is presumably ironic, as all the photographs are set in London. The mid-sixties were, of course, the heyday of the Beatles and their Liverpudlian followers. - Gunn, who earlier wrote a poem to Elvis Presley and later dedicated one to the Jefferson Airplane, could hardly ignore them. His own criticism of rock music has been unsurprisingly tolerant and clear-minded, notably 'The New Music', Listener, 2 May 1967, p129-30.
- I77. Positives p 24. True to its musical structure and notation, the final bar - 'the music has started' - is a recapitulation of the first - 'the music starts'.
- I78. Positives p 30.
- I79. Positives p 30. Cf the 'pleasurable pain' of 'But childhood takes a long time' with the similar alternation here, 'It is a lament, and then/it is not'.
- I80. Positives p 28. The poem alternates rhythmically between lines of three and eight syllables, action and thought. The 'self-regarding rider' captures well the narcissism of the 'mod' movement which the photograph celebrates.

- I81. Positives p 34. It is Gunn's peculiar ability to abstract moral beauty from the tawdry and second-rate - the fairground here, the working man's club of 'It is a lament', the bar-room jukebox of 'Elvis Presley'.
- I82. Positives p 38. The photograph here, a bizarre picture of a large lady with a heavy shopping basket perched on her head, has little direct connection with the poem which supposedly describes it!
- I83. Positives p 42, entitled 'Canning Town' in Poems 1950-1966: A Selection, London (Faber) 1969, itself superseded by a second winnowing of his own work by Gunn, Selected Poems 1950-75, London (Faber) 1979, which omits any poetry from Positives at all (though it reprints 'Misanthropos' in full)
- I84. Positives p 44.
- I85. Positives p 46. 'Lebensraum' is German for 'living space', the phrase with which Hitler justified his territorial incursions.
- I86. Positives p 50. This poem is clearly set in the East End, as carefully placed as the Marble Arch Odeon in 'Like a cliff', the City in 'Money is a form of dirt', Knightsbridge in 'You have no idea' and the Thames in 'He feels a breeze', all part of the geography of legend.
- I87. Positives p 52, entitled 'The Left Handed Irishman' in Poems 1950-1966.
- I88. Positives p 54. The sense of weight is increased by the stodgy length and heavy syntax of the concluding sentence.
- I89. Positives p 58.
- I90. Positives p 60.
- I91. Positives p 66. Compare the watcher in 'The Corridor', challenged by the scene he thought he had mastered. The man here is too old for such hope.
- I92. Positives p 68. The underlying conceit is that the the face is its own book, 'memoirs of the body' written on flesh itself.
- I93. Positives p 68.
- I94. This mingling of plant, animal and human life is enlarged on - Gunn's own Waste Land - in 'Elegy on the Dust' and 'The Garden of the Gods', the boneyard, containing remnants of the past, intimations of the future.
- I95. Positives p 76.
- I96. This is to be more clearly faced in 'Confessions of the Life Artist'.
- I97. Positives p 78, entitled 'The Old Woman' in Poems 1950-66.
- I98. 'Snowfall' in Touch has close connections with this final photograph, though it is too prolix, too descriptive to have been intended for inclusion in Positives itself.
- I99. Autobiographical note written for Faber by Gunn, quoted Bold p 77.

200. See Gunn's autobiographical fragment 'My Suburban Muse', Worlds, ed. G. Summerfield, Harmondsworth 1974 pp58-62. Gunn was born in Gravesend, but spent most of his adolescence in Hampstead, attending University College School. The poem 'Autobiography' evokes this period well (Worlds p 62).
201. John Carey, New Statesman, 23 December 1966, pp941-2.
202. Touch London (Faber) 1967, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 1967. Cf. the uncollected poem 'A Crab', London Magazine N.S. I. February 1962 p 6-7, in which even a sexual parasite becomes 'part of our touch'.
203. Julian Symons, New Statesman, 13 October 1967, p 476.
204. Martin Dodsworth, Review 18 (April 1968) pp46-61.
205. Ronald Hayman, Encounter 31 (July 1968) p 72.
206. Stephen Spender, Observer (quoted on the dust jacket of Positives).
207. Poetry Book Society Bulletin 54, September 1967.
208. Touch p 27. To make clear that this is a dramatic monologue, not personal revelation, Gunn has enclosed the poem in quotation marks - elsewhere he has written that the Life Artist (who owes much to Thomas Mann's epic novel Joseph und seine Brüder, 1933-43) attains self-control at the expense of 'certain lacks of feeling and spontaneity'.
209. Touch p 18 Cf Merlin imprisoned in the Rock in 'Merlin in the Cave'.
210. This may well be an ironic reference to St Matthew VI 25-34 - 'Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap ... consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin'.
211. Touch p 19.
212. The earlier fuller version, containing extra sections after II and VII and a different version of VII, appears in A Geography, Iowa City (Stone Wall Press) 1966 - along with the November issue of Poetry Chicago of the same year most of Touch was included (the major exception, 'Misanthropos', first performed in March 1965, first appeared in Encounter 25 (August 1965) pp19-25).
213. As in the earlier 'Vox Humana', this choosing is put deliberately in the passive tense: one is chosen by self-determination, and the only conscious decision is whether to accede.
214. Touch p 19.
215. This kind of exclusiveness is also true, of course, of many religions.
216. Touch p 19. Gunn here seems to agree with those critics who discerned an incipient fascism in his early work, his identification with the will - see The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse ed K. Allott, Harmondsworth, 2nd ed 1962, p 374.

217. Touch p 20. Cf. the 'dog generations' that few others can 'breed to train' in 'To Yvor Winters, 1955'.
218. Touch p 20. These 'bee-stung lips' are echoed in the 'beehive' hair of VII.
219. This recalls two of Gunn's most extraordinary poems, both uncollected, 'Interrogated to Interrogator' (London Magazine VI, March 1958) p II) and 'Knowledge' (Observer, 24 September 1961, p 28), both of which examine the close ties of affection between torturer and tortured, as in 'The Beaters'. In the first poem the two are 'committed to each other thus' and will 'never be other than accomplices', the roles startlingly reversed, circular,
- 'I cleave to this alone: to the light bunched
On the holster where the gun lies loose, unused.
To you, my prisoner, my interrogated'.
- In the second, the worst aspect of the torturers is the 'yearning look with which they gazed into their victim's faces': in such extremities
- '!...at times the pain of searching eyes
Met, wavered, fixed, and for an incredible slow
Moment of moments seemed to understand'.
220. Touch p 21.
221. As in Positives, again a photograph releases strong feeling in the poet. It is interesting to compare this poem with Geoffrey Hill's 'September Song', the same theme arcane, tightly reigned by Hill, simply stated by Gunn.
222. A Geography, Iowa City 1966.
223. Cf. the rubble in which the old lady roots in Positives, 'Elegy on the Dust'.
224. Touch p 22. Gunn comes increasingly to face such utter negation direct -
- 'What is important is not so much the perception of absurdity ... as
how one conducts oneself after making that perception ... to live
with that sickness, fully acknowledging it, and accepting it as the
basis of our actions'
- Selected Poems of Fulke Greville, ed Gunn, London 1968, p 32.
225. Touch p 24. In A Geography this poem is enclosed in quotation marks to emphasise that it is a persona, not Gunn, who is speaking. As the poem is set in the past tense, presumably the man's uncertainty has since ended.
226. Touch p 25. The poem is similar in style to Positives, similar in theme to the uncollected 'Old Man in the Britannia' (Poetry Chicago 109, November 1966, p 70) in which an old man watches the 'leisurely dignity' of three horses which weave through the crowded street, seeing an analogy for himself,
- 'and people bear with me
like wheeled traffic that
make way for horsemen'.
227. Cf 'The Corridor', the old man in 'The pigeon lifts' in Positives.

228. Touch p 55. Cf the crumbling warehouse of 'In watchful community', the unseen bird in 'The pigeon lifts, a few feet', both in Positives.
229. Touch p 56, the old-man's laconic explanation - 'What's there to do on Sundays? Sooner do this than booze' - is only a partial reply.
230. Touch p 13.
231. Touch p 13. Gunn was later wary of this poem, seeing its celebration of pure instinct as 'ultimately self-protective and predatory ... it defeats the exercise of sympathy as much as the over self-consciousness of the Life Artist'.
232. Touch p 52. The Tank is a punishment cell to be found in some American jails, and as such ties up with earlier images of imprisonment in Gunn's work; Merlin in his cave, 'La Prisonniere', 'Legal Reform'.
233. Touch p 23. Historical time in this poem is deliberately muddled, the medieval executioner who works in a modern warehouse, the formica block. The theme of condemned man as metaphor for all doomed humanity is common in existentialism, cf. Camus's L'Etranger, Paris 1942.
234. Touch p 16. As in 'Before the Carnival', the poem derives from a painting, here Chuck Arnett's 'Bravery', whose implications are teased out by Gunn.
235. The figure, and general gothic atmosphere, can be compared to those earlier self-images in 'The Secret Sharer' and 'The Monster'.
236. Touch p 51. Such merging is to achieve prominence in Moly.
237. Touch p 51. Cf the face, distorted in a pierglass, in 'The Corridor', again possibly a reflection of self, also compare John Donne's poem 'The Good Morrow' line 15, 'My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears', Poetical Works, ed. H. Grierson, London 1933.
238. Touch p 27. Patina is the incrustation, through age and disuse, which forms on antiques. As with Auden's tender lyrics, whether this poem is addressed to a woman or, as is more likely, a man is quite immaterial; its application is general.
239. Touch p 27. Just how far Gunn has come is revealed by comparison with 'Carnal Knowledge', also about two lovers sharing a bed, but in conflict not harmony, a basic incomprehension made no clearer by sexual knowledge.
240. Like the Goddess, the soldier is cast up by the sea 'whole through foam', a metaphorical Aphrodite (at this point Gunn was keeping his classical learning oblique, most strikingly in the gradual metamorphosis of 'Misanthropo
241. Touch p 28. Echoes abound, the soldier reminiscent of his counterpart in 'Incident on a Journey', his body scattered, 'greasy' like Lazarus, who rejected such a resurrection, confronting the dark like Julian, who greeted its 'simpler' outrage.

242. Touch p 54. In a hidden pun, sunbeams in Pierce Street 'pierce where they end'. Cf earlier disembodied art, the 'mural scratched there by an earlier man in 'Incident on a Journey', the darkened painting in 'Santa Maria del Popolo'. As in Fighting Terms, heroes are 'soldiers' of the imagination.
243. Touch p 14. Cf the mastering eye of 'L'Epreuve'.
244. These lovers are both Antony and Cleopatra - the poem's original epigram was 'kingdoms and provinces', Antony and Cleopatra Act III Scene X - and those Wagnerian favourites, much exercised at Bayreuth, Tristan and Isolde. Cf the uncollected poem 'Das Liebesleben' (Encounter XVI, March 1961, p 5) where these lovers are rewarded with 'the ultimate in orgasms (death)', yet
 'love involves things neither Tris-
 tran nor you could ever do:
 such as washing the dishes'.
 Rarely has Gunn plunged into such abject banality, such line-splitting.
245. Touch p 15. Part of Gunn's continuing interest is the interaction between decay and resistance, as in Positives 22, or 'The Produce District'.
246. Touch p 50. Cf the last photograph, a snowscene, in Positives, the snow under which Claus Von Stauffenberg falls, the 'Polish snow' of 'Misanthropos'.
247. Touch p 50.
248. Touch p 58. Cf W.B. Yeats 'Among School Children', Collected Poems 2nd ed, 1950, p 245, essence and expression, dance and dancer, Platonic ideal -
 'O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?'.
 249. Touch p 58.
250. 'Misanthropos' was originally a radio play for two voices, narrator (I-V, XII-XV, XVII) and 'last man' (VI-XI, XVI) first performed on the BBC Third Programme.
251. See The Poetry of Thom Gunn and Bold p 80-86. The whole work is carefully balanced and varied. For example, VII is in syllabics and pararrhymes, fitting its conversational tone and lack of sudden emphasis, while VI and VIII are written in full rhymes and iambics and, in turn, V and IX are again syllabics. VII is comparatively loose, VIII is almost perversely artificial.
252. Touch p 29. Cf the walkers 'devouring each detail, from leaf to dirt' in 'Back to Life'.
253. Cf the birds in 'On the Move', also keeping movement.
254. Touch p 29. Cf Shakespeare's Timon of Athens, a misanthrope who also lives apart from men, and who is buried, unredeemed, on the sea shore near the rhythms of the ocean.

255. Gunn here is closer to the use of this device in Jacobean tragedy - as in Act V of Webster's Duchess of Malfi - than its more normal employment in Elizabethan pastoral, as in Sydney's 'Echo'.
256. Touch p 30. Cf. Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, which remains a massive, if hidden, influence on the poem, not only Crusoe's listening to his own echo for companionship but the same isolation, self-reliance and the coming of other men (albeit hostile cannibals not redeemed survivors) just when least expected. Crusoe also uses retirement to aid reflection, memory to furnish desire.
257. Touch p 30. The echo fulfils the role of classical oracle, foretelling doom.
258. Moly p 47. The style of the first two sections develops that of My Sad Captains, that of the last two prefigures Moly.
259. Touch p 31, a phrase adapted to describe Gunn himself in the relevant chapter of P.R.King's Nine Contemporary Poets, London 1979.
260. Touch p 31. Cf earlier uniforms, the 'khaki man' of 'Lofty in the Palais de Danse', the 'swarthy' compactness of 'Innocence'.
261. Touch p 32. The moon has always been a symbol for the permanent, the non-human, as in 'A Village Edmund', 'and she stared at the pale intolerable moon'.
262. Touch p 33. 'Considering the Snail' is an earlier tracing of the same path, 'drenched there with purpose'.
263. Touch p 33. Abstract merges with particular - later the tribe 'file past my mind' - a trope which is to damage some of Gunn's later work.
264. Touch p 29. This is ambiguous - is hatred channeled towards or away.
265. My Sad Captains p 47. 'Adolescence' partially prefigures 'Misanthropos'.
266. Touch p 34. The sun reappears, metaphorically, in XV, in Moly.
267. Touch p 34. The refrain measures the mood of the poem.
268. Fighting Terms p 37. The speaker of 'Incident on a Journey' is also on the run, though from what is not made clear, he too is defined by a vision.
269. Touch p 35. For this 'indecision/a hunger in the senses' cf 'Vox Humana'.
270. Touch p 36. Gunn again adapts classical myth to fuel his own legend, the wood metamorphosised as 'dryads reposing in the bark's hard surface'.
271. My Sad Captains p 15 - 'Misanthropos' first comes to terms with, then transcends, the metaphysical horrors of 'The Annihilation of Nothing'.
272. Touch p 36. Once again, as in 'Bravery', the world is merely a mirror, other people the doppelgangers of self.
273. Cf King Lear Act III, Scene IV, Edgar's prose speech to Lear on the heath made in the guise of Poor Tom, emphasising this duplicity,

'A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair; wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of my mistress's heart, and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven: one that slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it'.

Gunn turns prose into verse, much as Shakespeare did himself with his own sources. Lear's heath has affinities with the last man's 'final hill'.

274. Touch p 37, itself entitled 'Memoirs of the World' in Poems 1950-66.

275. This is the title of poem X given, again, in Poems 1950-66.

276. Touch p 38. Cf the paralysis of 'Merlin in the Cave', or the uncollected 'The Paraplegic lying on his back' (London Magazine II, July 1955, p 13-14),

'For a mind is paralysed to stone
without a ready consciousness
That value does not drop like manna
But is wrenched from what is valueless'.

277. Touch p 38. The stars of 'My Sad Captains', 'Blackie, the electric Rembrandt'

278. Touch p 39. Cf Macbeth Act V Scene VI, line 'a tale/told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/signifying nothing'.

279. Touch p 39.

280. Cf 'Lebensraum', from Positives, where the man must run into the open until 'the bacillus of despair is/rendered harmless/isolated and frozen over'.

281. Touch p 40. Anton Schmidt is very similar to another kind of new, caring hero for Gunn, Claus von Stauffenberg, another Nazi victim, also dying in the show, his morality running counter to the madness of the time.

282. Touch pp 41-2. Again a Shakespearian parallel immediately suggests itself, Hamlet Act V Scene I, 'may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole'. Gunn makes such dust, as well as that of the Anglican burial service, uncomfortably real.

283. Cf Yeats: 'The Circus Animal's Desertion' (Collected Poems 1950 p 391-2),
'I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart'.

284. Touch p 42. The guilt of IX is at last assuaged.

285. Touch p 42. Any Christian interpretation of 'saviour' would be quite inappropriate; Gunn remains fully agnostic, for all his mythologising.

286. Touch p 43. The waking dream of X has been routed.

287. Touch p 43. The 'dense thicket' of I is now a 'thicket of time', concrete again yielding to abstract.

288. Touch p 43. Cf the 'nebulae' of X, the orbiting heroes of 'My Sad Captains'.

289. Touch p 44.
290. Touch p 46. Cf X; the 'blurred outline' of the intruder.
291. Cf King Lear Act III, Scene IV, 'poor naked wretches', man reduced to basics.
292. Touch p 46. In 'The Wound' such scarring was a sign of weakness, of psychological imbalance; here it is a sign of humanity, an indication of how far Gunn has travelled since his early brilliant heartlessness.
293. Touch p 47. Force is now an instrument of gentleness.
294. Touch p 47. Cf, 'L'Epreuve', 'bombed by/rockets that explode greenly'.
295. Touch p 29. As with the sea in I, the earlier parts of 'Misanthropos' must be interpreted in the light of these developments.
296. Touch p 48. This is the final hill, from which the 'last man' at last emerges.
297. Touch p 48. In many primitive cultures, to name is to achieve power.
298. Touch p 48. Cf VII, 'master/or the world's abject servant'.
299. Touch p 49.
300. Touch p 49.
301. Touch p 46. The style eerily prefigures that of Moly.
302. Touch p 39.
303. Touch p 49. The conclusion is as deeply pessimistic as 'Confessions of the Life Artist' - 'the solar system/will flare up and fall into/space, irretrievably lost' - with one crucial difference. There, for life 'there is no justification', here human sympathy is its own reward, its own art.
304. 'Thom Gunn writes', Poetry Book Society Bulletin 54, September 1967.
305. Moly, London (Faber) 1971,
306. Douglas Dunn, Encounter 37 (August 1971) pp70-1. A measure of Dunn's lack of comprehension of such mythical technique - he is himself, of course, a superb naturalistic poet - is his noting of Gunn's method of writing about modern subjects in 'antique' settings!
307. Ian Hamilton, Observer, 4 April 1971, p 36. Gunn's daring accords ill with Hamilton's infamous orthodoxy, that critical Robespierre discerning 'an approximate vocabulary, an obediently trotting metric, some murderous line breaks' (Dunn similarly finds 'his rhymes are dull, the rhythms limiting').
308. Alan Brownjohn, New Statesman, 19 March 1971, pp393-4.
309. Michael Fried, Review 25 (Spring 1971), pp59-60.
310. John Fuller, Listener, 25 March 1971, pp381-2. Gunn has certainly developed a new, less heavily symbolic, kind of abstraction, but the distance that he has travelled since Fighting Terms remains vast.

311. Julian Jebb, Financial Times, quoted on dust jacket of 1973 paperback ed. of Positives. Jebb later directed a fine television film of Gunn reading from Moly, accompanied by appropriate Californian sunsets.
312. Anon, Times Literary Supplement, 16 April 1971, p 439.
313. Thom Gunn, Poetry Book Society Bulletin 68, Spring 1971. Like Odysseus, the poet is 'an explorer and adventurer who lives experience through, in detail, and yet can always extract himself from it', aware, through myth, of 'blood powers and earth powers that he does not fully understand'.
314. See Homer, The Odyssey, transl. E.V.Rieu, Harmondsworth 1946, Book X 'Circe', and Ovid, Metamorphoses, transl. R. Humphries, Bloomington 1955, Book XIV.
315. Poetry Book Society Bulletin 68.
316. The Fall in Paradise Lost, the Redemption, through Christ's temptations in the wilderness, in Paradise Regained.
317. Idylls of the King, discussed earlier in Chapter One, ends with Arthur's fall, and yet the possibility of resurrection, 'and the new sun rose, bringing the new year!.
318. See note 4. To aid this attempt on the inexpressible, Gunn explores fleeting and difficult experience in a range of carefully structured verse forms, formal meter and rhymes. The syllabic experiments, the delicacy of Touch, are subverted for a new plain style owing much to Fulke Greville, whose work Gunn had recently edited - Selected Poems of Fulke Greville, London 1968.
319. Initiation rites play an important part in every known society; see Arnold van Gennep, Les Rites De Passage, Paris 1909. Like Hermes, 'the down just showing on his face', the boy is growing a beard - 'skin is barklike and, feel, rough' - facial hair an image of burgeoning masculinity.
320. Cf. the wolf boy, 'the familiar itch of close dark hair'.
321. Moly p 13. Cf 'The Goddess' who also waits, out of sight, until ready for action, Oedipus who similarly hides from the parents who believe him dead.
322. Moly p 13. The Father is possibly God, his garden Eden.
323. Moly p 14. Hide toughens, feet grow into hooves as in the previous poem.
324. Cf. the serving man of 'Misanthropos' IX, who serves himself a 'trencher of human flesh', cannibalism transformed into merely a by-product of animality.
325. Moly p 15. The gods are set apart from men, their metamorphoses 'all holy', not degraded into swine.
326. Moly p 16. Cf 'Misanthropos' IV, watching the moon.
327. Gunn, born on 29 August 1929 under the sign of Virgo, presumably had the moon in Scorpio during his birth hour. Astrology, Chaucer notwithstanding, has not been used as a governing myth often in poetry (perhaps just as well).

328. Moly p 17. Cf. 'Snowfall', a secret network of vaults that 'honeycomb' the land with 'galleries of their sleep'.
329. Moly p 17. Moon on the night sky is white on black, an early prefigurement of moly itself, its root black, its flower white.
330. 'Oubliettes' are another form of prison, cf 'La Prisonniere', 'Condemned to Life', 'The Tank', even the misanthropos on his 'final hill'.
331. Moly p 18. Cf, perhaps, Ibsen's Peer Gynt peeling the onion, all surface, no heart. This (imaginary) metamorphosis is the most disconcerting of all.
332. Phaedra fell in love with her stepson Hippolytus. He refused her and she hanged herself, but her husband, his father Theseus slew him in error. The action is given a rural, 19th century setting here, with unsettling glimpses of the modern, moleskin waistcoat and tractor oil.
333. Moly p 19. This has an authentic ballad ring to it, suitable for such a sober, slow recounting of sexual passions, folklore's (literal) lifeblood.
334. Moly p 20.
335. Moly p 21. In 'Innocence' just such a damaged consciousness - perverted by Nazi ideology - was reprehensible. Here 'innocence' is welcome, leading to the work's climax, sunshine as 'petal of light lost in your innocence'.
336. Moly p 21. 'That old trust' here corresponds with the 'old big place' of 'Touch', sand the dust of 'Misanthropos' made golden, precious by sunlight.
337. Moly p 22. The lesson of such 'wise indifference' is lost on Phaedra.
338. Moly p 23. The return to mother earth, started in the 'message' of the opening poem, is well under way, a preparation for the 'death-rich earth'.
339. Moly p 25. Cf the moon shadows of part I of 'For Signs'.
340. Moly p 26. Cf the achieved balance of 'On the Move', 'afloat on movement',
 'One chooses the movement in a valueless world,
 Choosing it, till, both hurler and hurled,
 One moves as well, always toward, toward'.
 'From the Wave' could be seen as an aquatic version of the earlier poem!
341. Again a reference to Hermes, 'the down just showing on his face'.
342. Moly p 29. Cf the heroes of 'My Sad Captains', sexual adventurers.
343. Moly p 30. The style of this prose poem has startling affinities with the threefold descriptive narration of Mercian Hymns or Stations, discussed earlier. The poem looks forward directly to 'Being Born', 'distant smoke frozen in the sky', a second parallel that can not be so fortuitous.
344. Moly p 31. The strange Australian duck-billed platypus, a mammal that still lays eggs before suckling its young (and rather gratuitously dragged in here).

345. Moly p 3I, duality from dual separateness.
346. Moly p 33.
347. Moly p 34. An image to be made into myth in 'The Garden of the Gods', a kind of eternity (cf. the cycle of wheat in 'The Book of the Dead').
348. When originally printed in the pamphlet Sunlight, New York 1969, the machine was described, in a now excised passage, as being 'like a T.V. set' and 'full of coloured lights', inside which 'from an unseen hook, dangles a bunch of scraps - string, chain and foil - which turns smoothly but on an irregular axis'. The machine is obviously some kind of psychedelic artefact.
349. Moly p 36. At the end of Moly all men follow his example, giving themselves up totally to light, to oblivion.
350. Moly p 37. The poem is based on the form of an Elizabethan street song, modern drug-pusher become a man proudly singing the praises of his wares.
351. Moly p 39. This celebrates the annual Renaissance Fair held in San Rafael Woods, near San Francisco (which explains the anachronistic references to buckskins and 'tawny jerkins'). The 'god's experiment' is that of moly.
352. Moly p 40. 'Borrowings out of nearby birch and clay' echo the 'compound of rot' of 'The Rooftop'.
353. Moly p 4I. These two short lines have provoked more obloquy on Gunn than anything else he has written - 'is this the famous blowing of the mind?', Neil Rennie, London Magazine N.S. XI:2 June/July 1971, p 130.
354. Moly p 42. Natty Bumppo is the hero of J. Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, a white hunter who lived among the Indians. Gunn follows Gary Snyder's deep admiration for the Indian tribal communities, and their deep-rooted connections, through myth, with the American landscape. See his fine collection of essays, Earth House Hold, New York 1968, which has much influence on Gunn.
355. Moly p 43.
356. Moly p 43. Gunn is to return to his origins in Jack Straw's Castle.
357. Moly p 44. Cf 'Elegy on the Dust', for which this poem is very much a counterpart. Death is still master, but it now includes endless renewal.
358. Moly p 45.
359. Moly p 46. Cf 'For Signs', where, similarly, 'each clump of reeds/is split with darkness and yet bristles whole'.
360. Moly p 47. Cf the music of the 'Jefferson Airplane' that also 'comes and goes on the wind', almost a natural force.
361. Moly p 47. 'Angel' is the biblical term for 'messenger', bringer of good news from God (or indeed the gods) to man.

362. Moly p 48, prefigured in 'Tom-Dobbin' III, 'distant smoke frozen in the sky'.
363. Moly p 49. The sun becomes furnace of life.(Hermes its smithy?).
364. Moly p 50. Cf 'For Signs' 3, the same 'palings of a fence'-as in I here.
365. Moly p 51. Cf the ocean in 'From the Wave', 'a concave wall/down-ribbed with shine', also 'building tall/its steep incline'.
366. Moly p 51. Snow here is symbol of purity, not of rejection, as in 'From the Highest Camp', or oblivion - 'A Snow Vision', the final photograph in Positives, Claus von Stauffenberg'.
367. Moly p 52. Chill again as absolution, the 'blunt leaves of iceplant'.
368. Moly p 52. The lovers return to water almost as womb - cf. the opening poems/photographs in Positives.
369. Moly p 53. Cf. 'The Byrnie's'; just as here reflections flash 'their many answers to the one', so these earlier, homesick sun-worshippers
 '... saw light trapped among the man-made joints,
 Central in every link it burned,
 Reduced and steadied to a thousand points'.
370. Moly p 53. The magic plant at last reveals itself, in a tromp d'oeil, as sunlight.
371. Moly p 54. The innocence shed in 'Rites of Passage' has, through great effort, been restored, the poem is again essentially circular.
372. Robert Duncan, Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's Moly (limited author's typescript ed.) January 1972. The work also appeared in Poetry Review, Autumn 1971, ('Interrupted Forms. One'), Poetry Review, Autumn 1972, ('Preface to the Suite Translated from Thom Gunn's Moly', 'Not far from Circe's house', 'Rites of Passage', 'Moly', 'Second Take on Rites of Passage').
373. Duncan quotes the passage which opens Gunn's Moly - Hermes granting moly to Odysseus - but translated either by Pope or, if not, by Broome.
374. Pope translated Books 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22 and 24; most of 10, 15.
 Elijah Fenton translated Books 1, 4, 19, 20.
 Broome translated Books 2, 6, 8, 11, 12, 16, 18, 23; part of 10, 15.
375. Robert Duncan, 'Moly', Poetry Review, Vol 63, No 3, Autumn 1972, p 200.
376. Robert Duncan, 'Second Take on Rites of Passage', Ibid p 203.
377. Moly p 43.
378. Moly p 53.
379. Touch p 44.
380. Moly p 54.

381. Jack Straw's Castle, London 1976.
382. Neil Powell, Carpenters of Light Manchester 1979, p 58.
383. 'Thom Gunn writes', Poetry Book Society Bulletin 90, Autumn 1976.
384. John Bayley, 'Castles and Communes', Times Literary Supplement, 24 September 1976, p II94. Clothed in discrete sensitivities, this is the most vindictive attack on Gunn yet made, 'counterfeiting poetry with a highly accomplished and covertly malignant skill', perhaps because it is more an attack on a whole life style, poetry made 'a part of living together', passed around like drugs.
385. Patrick Swinden, 'Thom Gunn's Castle', Critical Quarterly 19³ (1977) p 58. The collection brings to the surface Gunn's major theme, the difficulty of writing poetry about what is conventionally beyond language.
386. Clive Wilmer, 'Definition and Flow: a personal reading of Thom Gunn', P.N. Review 5³ (1978), p 56. The whole article is a superb defence of Gunn by a poet whose own work has been much under his influence, admitting Gunn's undoubted (occasional) failures of style or persona, but seeing this as part of his delight in risk-taking, his belief in 'the capacity for change'.
387. See Frederick Grubb, 'Peacetime Conscript: Thom Gunn', A Vision of Reality London 1965 pp 203-13.
388. Poetry Book Society Bulletin 90.
389. 'The Bed', 'Diagrams', 'Iron Landscapes', 'Fever', 'The Corporal', and 'The Geysers' all first appeared (in book form) in To the Air Boston 1973; 'The Night Piece' and 'Three Songs' in Songbook, New York 1973.
390. Wilmer p 55.
391. Jack Straw's Castle p 14. Cf the half-demolished cinema in Positives 22.
392. This perhaps alludes to the black power sign (a catch-all show of political determination), a raised clenched fist.
393. See To the Air p 9, and Powell pp 53-4. The earlier poem is a much clearer description of a sexual hustler, 'joints and amyl' for stimulation, who fails to make the intended conquest at an all-night bar. The Rake of earlier poems is indeed ageing, 'getting less beautiful toward the evening's end'.
394. Jack Straw's Castle p 20. Published separately as Poem after Chaucer, New York 1971.
395. Jack Straw's Castle p 22. The epigraph 'Thou hast thy walkes for health as well as sport' comes from Ben Jonson's poem 'To Penshurst', line 9.
396. To the Air p 18.
397. Perhaps Gunn's poetic nadir - 'the bastard passed me by/fuck you asshole' - although such inanities (crude more in conception than language) at least continue Gunn's concern for the dispossessed!

398. In addition, 'The Night Piece' loses its opening two stanzas in book form.
399. The predominant digging metaphor is characteristic of Heaney, of the Hill of Mercian Hymns.
400. Jack Straw's Castle p 36.
401. The etchings in this volume are, of course, Bewick's most celebrated work.
402. Gunn, quoted C. Wilmer p 54.
403. Jack Straw's Castle p 40. The angel here is, like Hermes, a messenger.
404. Ibid p 42.
405. Saturnalia was held in mid-December, a ceremony in which the usual was suspended, dress was reversed between the sexes, social distinctions were reversed. See Funk and Wagnall p 974.
406. Jack Straw's Castle pp 43-4.
407. 'Thom Gunn writes', PBSB 90.
408. Jack Straw's Castle p 46. Here, perversely, Nature is not mother but father.
409. Ibid p 58. The debate parodies the Renaissance argument poem.
410. Jack is a common name for a legendary hero, Jack Straw is also the title of a song written for the Grateful Dead rock group by Robert Hunter. Jack was imprisoned - in some traditions - by a giant and imprisoned in a dungeon. See Funk and Wagnall pp 534-6. See also Chapter Six, note 26.
411. The epigraph to part 2 of Jack Straw's Castle is taken from Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens similarly evoking an 'ugly chamber' that haunts the imagination.
412. Jack Straw's Castle p 49.
413. Medusa can, of course, freeze those who look direct at her (she was defeated by Perseus). Charles Manson is a more contemporary evil spirit, a man whose ritual, tribal murders helped destroy the hippy dream of Moly.
414. Jack Straw's Castle p 51.
415. Ibid p 52, Cf 'Knowledge', 'Interrogator to Interrogated', even 'The Beaters' for a similar sense of complicity between torturer and tortured.
416. Ibid p 54.
417. Ibid p 55.
418. Ibid p 53.
419. Ibid p 56.
420. This comes to a climax in 'Breaking Ground'.
421. Jack Straw's Castle p 62.
422. Ibid p 63.

423. Ibid p 69. Cf the energy spreading out from the centre in Positives, the mastering vision of 'From the Centre' in Moly.
424. Cf. the earlier poem 'Innocence', significantly enough dedicated also to Tony White. True innocence is again hardened into a morale, an armour.
425. Jack Straw's Castle p 68. Gunn has learnt to celebrate, not dread, his doppelgangers. Cf the 'fascinated face' in 'The Corridor'.
426. Ibid p 74. Cf 'L'Epreuve', the poet a 'hovering planet'.
427. Thom Gunn, The Missed Beat (The Gruffyground Press) *Vermont* 1976
428. Thom Gunn: A Bibliography 1940-78, ed. J. Hagstrom and G. Bixby, London 1979.
429. Worlds, ed. G. Summerfield, Harmondsworth 1974, pp58-62.
430. Neil Powell, Carpenters of Light p 58.
431. 'My Cambridge', Poetry Dimension Annual 5: the best of the Poetry Year, ed. Dannie Abse, London 1978 p 164.
432. Ibid pp170-1.
433. See letter from Gunn quoted by Bold p 8;
 'I was quite a self-enclosed middle-class boy till the death of my mother when I was about 14; after which I spent about half the year in Hampstead and the other half with aunts in Snodland, Kent, where I worked on their milk round quite often'.
434. Monterey was the first, and the most artistically and socially successful of the open air, free pop festivals. It closely followed on, in timing and spirit, from that in the Polo Grounds, San Francisco celebrated in 'Listening to Jefferson Airplane'. For further information on this tangled period, see Ralph Gleason, The Jefferson Airplane and the San Francisco Sound, New York 1969 pp1-82. This song cannot be the Beatles song of the same name, which was released in 1970, three years after Monterey was held.
435. Thom Gunn, 'Hardy and the Ballads', Agenda 10²⁻³, Spring-Summer 1972, p 45.
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CHAPTER FIVE.

A NEW MYTH:

THE POETRY OF TED HUGHES.

In Thom Gunn's work, truth is visible, discovered in the sunlight of Moly. Conversely, for Ted Hughes, truth is inward, a hidden secret to be wrested from the darkness of Crow. Dick Davis has recently drawn a crucial distinction between 'Gunn's instinct for definition and Hughes' for evocation',¹ and such a profound divergence (for all the literary packaging that seeks to unite them as a kind of hybrid 'Ted Gunn',²) enters their verse technique - Gunn obsessed by metre and form, Hughes abandoning both for an evoked chaos - their philosophical stance - Gunn a man alone, Hughes drowning in Nature - and their very myths. Gunn's 'first man' is

'wary, individual, reaching out tentatively toward a wholly separate and strange world; whereas Hughes' Prometheus suffers and is devoured'.³

Indeed this very division between the rational and the intuitive forms the underlying myth that structures Hughes' whole output, taught by early immersion in The White Goddess,⁴ defined by close study of that greatest of mirrors, Shakespeare. Venus battles with Adonis, the Celtic pre-Christian goddess with the 'materialist and democratising outlook and rational philosophy',⁵ of Renaissance puritanism. If Shakespeare recorded victory by the latter, a true modern poet (Hughes) must reconvene the fight, bring England back to a psychic wholeness, a mythical unity -

'The presence of the great goddess of the primaeval world ... is precisely what England seems to have lacked, since the Civil War ... where negotiations were finally broken off'.⁶

In the first draft of his extraordinary essay 'Myth and education', Hughes sees the outcome of these 'three hundred years of rational enlightenment' as a kind of mass hypnosis, a passive abandonment of the senses (as to the detached reality of television) through which the imagination is atrophied, the old myths discredited 'reducing the Bible to a bundle of old woman's tales, finally murdering God'. Such stasis can only be resolved through imaginative literature - Plato's ideal education,⁷ the magical evocations of early epic⁸ - psychic, timeless

'hospitals where we heal, where our imaginations are healed, that when they are evil works they are also battlefields where we get injured'.⁹

Both this sense of the poet's almost divine importance and the very real dangers involved in such extreme openness to experience haunt Hughes' work, and indeed his life, that 'familiar brooding figure',¹⁰ the private tragedy of Sylvia Plath made public property, a literary myth¹¹. Hughes further fuels his own myth in the now

notorious conversation with Egbert Faas, arguing for a poetry of violence, thus escaping from rational scepticism into a charged, threefold symbolism - precise natural description, 'invocation of the Goddess', evocation of 'elemental force' - to summon up 'the elemental power circuit of the Universe'. Danger, again, is all.

'If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? To accept the energy and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control - rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one,'^{I2}. Mythology shapes the inner world of the imagination - the 'shamanistic flight and return' of the Bardo Thodol^{I3}, the 'dream of the call' behind all great poetry^{I4} - and for the most perceptive modern writers (again Hughes) the spirit call must be answered, the cure found and safely brought back, old thought-patterns expunged.

'In their world Christianity is just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit. Their world is a continuance or a re-emergence of the pre-Christian world,'^{I5}.

Hughes returns to this theme in the rewritten 'Myth and Education'. Where once 'the inner world and Christianity were closely identified', the surrender of faith to Science has discredited this inner world as 'a bundle of fairy tales, a relic of primitive superstition', modern man has fallen into 'a huge sickness'. Again, the result is spiritual paralysis, imagination decayed into a scientific objectivity.

'A bright, intelligent eye, full of exact images, set in a head of the most frightful stupidity,'^{I6}.

The only escape, therefore, lies in 'subjective imagination'; not psychoanalysis - which has merely defined this sickness - or (as with Gunn) drugs, which lead only to another, inner prison. The greatest mythic narratives - irreducible, a single 'word,'^{I7} - can heal by uniting inner world to outer, complex waking dreams:

'A simple tale, told at the right moment, transforms a person's life with the order its pattern brings to incoherent energies ... it has brought all that into a human pattern, and made it part of our understanding,'^{I8}.

Hughes is both trained anthropologist^{I9} and fullblown mystic²⁰, a scholarly interpreter of distant myths and a despiser of intellectuals, a man who creates difficult, highly wrought poems about his love for the elemental, the primitive. Without the evidence of his poetry, such theories - myth as psychic medicine - would appear bizarre, almost the lucid ravings of a madman: when they provide the

spark to ignite such creativity they must be taken seriously²¹. The difficulty is really one of belief. Talking about the shaman/poet's flight into the spirit world, Hughes quotes the 'American healer and prophet' Edgar Cayce as proof, an 'example of one man who dreamed the dreams and accepted the task, who was not a poet ... and of course he returned with the goods'²².

Such an 'of course' is gratuitous, an arrogance. Cayce was a faith-healer who advocated lettuce as a panacea - supplying 'an effluvium in the blood stream' to destroy germs - believed in Atlantis (his evidence taken 'from the aether'), and made his diagnosis in a hypnotic trance²³. In just the same way, Keith Sagar's study of Hughes' poetry - for all its deep learning, its lack of academic cant, its sheer readability - takes on a matching apocalyptic tone, Hughes a greater Lawrence

'searching for a position that cannot be outflanked, which maintains human dignity and purpose without falsifying the facts, which recovers the sane and sacred without evasion, abstraction or doctrine'²⁴.

Again, the shaman is uncomfortably close to the sham, the trickster to trickery; Sagar quotes Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan as a genuine seer, whereas he elsewhere has been proved a literary fraud²⁵. And yet, again, the unmasker of Castaneda²⁶ goes on to stress the spiritual depth of his work, such imposture truly irrelevant. Hughes' poetry has a similar directness, a boldness that escapes normal restraints.

Such incaution rapidly made enemies, 'Ted Hughes was an immediate embarrassment to the critical establishment'²⁷. Al Alvarez set Hughes' vitality against Larkin's 'gentility'²⁸, yet others found merely a gratuitous 'voyeur of violence'²⁹, preaching 'a facile code of suicidal heroism'³⁰. Hughes, conversely, respects post-war distrust of 'the heroic efforts to make new worlds' - a Larkinesque retreat into 'a nice view of the park' - but himself refuses to be bound by it.

'Now I came a bit later. I hadn't had enough. I was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to be out there'³¹.

He goes beyond welfare-state humanism, 'our materialist, non-organic democracy', into ritual and myth, the closed world of The White Goddess, the natural world perceived as emblems, proofs of his philosophy. Hughes remains a curiously self-sufficient, isolated figure³². His work remains profoundly uncomfortable, passion that challenges intellect, rich pearls grown from such complex irritation.

The most startling characteristic of The Hawk in the Rain³³, Hughes first

collection, is the energy of its language, Shakespearian dialect³⁴, a style which
 'combines a colloquial prose readiness with poetic breadth, a ritual
 intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with clear direct
 feeling, and yet in the end is nothing but casual speech'³⁵.

The title poem at once establishes Hughes, not with a whimper but a bang. The cool
 syntax of the Movement - Donald Davie's pure articulation³⁶ - is wrenched into chaos.
 Wordsworthian Nature suddenly grows malignant; 'rain hacks my head to the bone'.
 Man drowns (metaphorically) in sea, (literally) in the 'dogged grave' of earth.
 Above, the hawk mirrors this 'fulcrum of violence' and yet resists it, a 'diamond
 point of will', though eventually he too must succumb to the flux he evolved from.

'The horizon trap him, the round angelic eye
 Smashed, mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land'³⁷.

Jaguar and macaw are caged but untamed, again memorials of an older, purer world
 in which instinct can defeat reason and the senses yield to an amoral vitality.

'The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
 By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear'³⁸.

Modern man too is 'behind bars'. His 'vital fire' spent, he is a dry husk of old
 emotions, a 'lumbering obsolete' survivor of when 'half the world still burned'.
 Thus the Great War is made myth³⁹, a simpler age of fear and heroism, 'nor prehist-
 oric or fabulous beast more dead' than its soldiery. Hughes opposes the dignity
 of 'megalith still' horses to the fatuity of civilized man, an 'Egg-head' whose thin
 shell of skull blots out the senses. The poet would bite the hand that feeds (and
 indeed reads) him, attacking the intellect in a very intellectualised, vindictive way.

'A tossing upside-down team drags him on fire
 Among the monsters of the zodiac'⁴⁰.

Hughes' real subject, however, is his pursuit of the White Goddess, the young girl
 naked 'under every full moon'. 'Odi atque amo', to love is also to hate⁴¹. 'Song'
 captures both the cruelty and beauty of such a quest; the passing of love presages
 waste, flood and tempest, the poet too reduced to death's despair, life's exhaustion.

'And my head, worn out with love, at rest
 In my hands, and my hands full of dust,
 O my lady'⁴².

Love is a kind of untaming, a return to the primeval, a willed ancient mastery. Thus
 the Dove Breeder rides the new morning, 'a big-eyed hawk on his fist'. The rain is
 also, temporarily, held at bay.

The hawk is resurgent in Lupercal⁴³ - 'I hold Creation in my foot' - this myth of Nature (strength mastering flux) is further reinforced. Thrushes are 'more coiled steel than living', pike are 'stunned by their own grandeur', and the world itself 'hammered to a ring of brass through a bull's nostril. In such a pitiless, primeval land - a lily pond can conceal 'prehistoric bedraggoned times', 'Relic' can reveal a sea of jaws - man has two alternatives. Either he can retreat into art, 'carving at a tiny ivory ornament', or he must fight for survival, like Dick Straightup 'so full of legend and life' and the colonel 'his own caricature' (both of them now dead);

'... The man-eating British lion
By a pimply age brought down'⁴⁴.

Such self-reliance nears the supernatural. Esther's Tomcat 'is unkillable', while a mouse cornered and transfixed is held 'whether in God's eyes or the eyes of a cat'. Indeed, 'we are all held in utter mock by the cats', even the otter combines a 'tomcat's round head' with 'oil of water body', flesh and fish. 'A king in hiding', he

'Brings the legend of himself
From before wars or burials, in spite of hounds ...
Re-enters the water by melting'⁴⁵.

This 'red unmanageable life' derides the attempts of men to master or dispose of it, scavenges their skulls⁴⁶, and emerges snowdrop-brutal, 'thirsting'. If The Hawk in the Rain approached fairy-tale in 'The Hag' and biblical legend in 'Fair Choice', so Lupercal freezes Hughes half-way between bestiary and myth-making. Thus, 'Mayday on Holderness' was intended as an overture to a long poem on England, like the full Crow a myth that failed. Its bloodstream a coiled river - 'loaded single vein' - its intestines a flowing snake, the hidden, damaged life of England endures undeterred.

'The crow sleeps gluttoned and the stoat begins ...
Couples at their pursuits are laughing in the lane'⁴⁷.

Hughes, like Frankenstein, creates his cosmology from dead fragments: Homer in the vengeful 'Everyman's Odyssey', Persephone in the oblique 'Fire Eater', even deadened Christianity in 'Crag Jack's Apostasy'. For Jack, God appears in 'an animal's dreamed head', and, again, the ravening wolf of 'February' or the sacrificed dog and goat of 'Lupercalia' are ritual deaths that bring fertility, reawake 'this frozen one'⁵⁰. Even Roman deities, however, must yield to the Goddess. The 'moon-horned river' they tried to purge takes strength from Cleopatra, 'now let the snake reign'⁵¹.

The asp took Sylvia Plath too, Hughes fell silent for three years⁵², Nature fully darkened into myth. In the bitter cast-away Recklings⁵³, a serpent ate deep into England's soul - 'whorish dragon of the dark ages' - devouring 'virginal Saint George'. In Wodwo⁵⁴ the snake, a 'starved adder', comes into its kingdom. Woman merges into serpent, Eve into Satan, in three poems that upend Biblical myth. In Eve,

'The serpent remains earthen, brutishly veined,
Rooted in crevices, living on flies and men'⁵⁵.

'Reveille' wakes Adam and Eve with 'a sudden, cruel bite'; the snake's coils crush 'all Eden's orchards', stretching away into history. In 'Theology', Hughes sets right the 'dark intestine' of truth. Adam ate the apple, so, in turn, 'Eve ate Adam/the serpent ate Eve'. Thus triumphant, Satan (as serpent) inherits Paradise,

'Smiling to hear
God's querulous-calling'⁵⁶.

Jahweh, the Jewish/Christian creator, is as powerless against the 'nightmare' of evolution as he is in 'Logos'. 'God is a good fellow, but His Mother's against Him'⁵⁷. Thus the White Goddess continues her quiet dominance, through her theology - male godhead refracted to death through her mirrors⁵⁸ - her taboos - 'worst of all the beanflower'⁵⁹ - and her totems, the quail, hare and roebuck of 'The Wound'.⁶⁰ The twin myths of Goddess and Great War inter-react, just as Wodwo itself forms a complete whole, drama into poetry, verse into prose⁶¹, a self-reflecting 'single work'. Ripley may escape the Goddess, and walk right through the land of the dead, but the moon still rules, 'stripe of blood, O sail of death'. Vengeful and almost childishly vindictive, yet the Goddess also presages fulfilment, completion.

'The moon has stepped back like an artist gazing amazed at a work
That points at him amazed'⁶².

Wodwo indeed points toward the brutal cosmology of Crow, a new order based on 'the surrealism of folklore'⁶³, emblems from Nature. Bear becomes 'ferryman/to dead land', Rat is forced 'down into godhead', Gnats are 'the angels of the only heaven' and Larks

'Like sacrifices set floating
The cruel earth's offering'⁶⁴.

In such a harsh world, ghost crabs are 'God's only toys'; reality is like the tearing of bandages from the embalmed dead⁶⁵. The poet can only - like Wodwo - 'go on looking' at such obscure, savage reality, seeking self in the entrails of animals, of Crow.

With Crow⁶⁶, Hughes at last creates his own mythology (conversely) by a dark synthesis and compression of earlier, communal myths, most obviously Christianity, to which it forms both variant reading and ironic commentary. Hughes uses both the events of Genesis and the verbal formulae of the King James translation - genealogy in 'Lineage', catechism in 'Examination at the Womb-door', chant in 'Two Legends' - as a springboard, Christian exempla for a post-Christian world, exploded truths,

'Christianity is just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit'⁶⁷.

Crow has many points of departure - Indian trickster myths⁶⁸, Bran the totem of England⁶⁹, the Greek god of healing⁷⁰, the Celtic death-goddess Morrighu (herself an aspect of the White Goddess)⁷¹, the ritual transformations of native folklore⁷² - but it gains a stubborn life of its own, poem becomes one with its myth. Critical discussion of Crow is amputated in that, as yet, of 'an epic folk-tale alternating prose and verse'⁷³ only the songs are as yet extant, the narrative is missing. No wonder that the whole project remains so intangible, so mysterious; Hughes' various explanations shed confusion not light. Crow represents 'God's nightmare attempt to improve on man'⁷⁴, and yet 'the whole purpose is...to turn him into a man'⁷⁵. The work is simply 'the songs that a Crow would sing'⁷⁶ and yet it incorporates two complex narratives. Crow is a creation of nightmare, endlessly tested by God, endlessly buoyant and inquisitive, endlessly reborn⁷⁷. Crow is engaged on an endless search for his creator; after a succession of female monsters whom he destroys, he is forced to carry an ogress over a river. By answering seven ritual questions he reaches the other side, where she is revealed as a princess, his bride and his mother (the White Goddess)⁷⁸. Critics have provided further keys for the same, possibly non-existent lock. Crow is an imitation of cartoon violence (and, it is implied, disposability)⁷⁹, a sick, desperate 'welter of bloodthirstiness and hate'⁸⁰, an attempt to 'reach a peace in annihilation'⁸¹, 'Absentist perversity... very nearly the end of poetry'⁸². Others see it as a new start, however, a pioneering use of myth to convey 'demonic force'⁸³, 'a grafting of the new onto the very old',⁸⁴ a shamanistic flight and return⁸⁵. Certainly, Crow and man are indivisible, alien.

'A crow is a sign of life...Between the crow and the man...a horrible connection has found its way...A crow has come up from the maker of the world. The crow watches the man'⁸⁶.

The deliberate non-linear approach of Crow precludes any definitive, over-easy explanation of either its narrative or mythic background; the sequence is far from being complete⁸⁷, indeed such chaos, such incompleteness is part of its very essence. The opening six poems deal with Crow's own creation, in making defining him. 'Two Legends' present a cosmology of despair, a God who cannot create order or light, the Eskimo legend that 'in the beginning the raven was the only creature and the world was, like him, black'⁸⁸. For Crow, such blackness is endemic - of eye, guts and soul - a nihilism unable to 'pronounce its sun' learnt from the whole world, from God.

'Black is the earth-globe, one inch under,
An egg of blackness'⁸⁹

that hatches the 'black rainbow' of crow, rejecting such emptiness, 'flying' free. 'Lineage' traces the ancestors of Crow, Christianity reversed - Adam begat Mary, Mary begat God, begat Nothing - Crow born ~~both~~ from such negativeness and, in a typical double-take, the real crow's equally squalid arrival, 'trembling featherless elbows in the nest's filth'. 'Examination at the Womb-door' quizzes Crow as to his God, his owner and the earth's. Death is the constant answer, 'stronger than life', but Crow - as his frequent resurrections are to show - is 'stronger than death' itself, with such confidence can 'pass' both examination and womb-door⁹⁰. In 'A Kill', conversely, Crow's birth is seen as a kind of death, perception dulled by the senses,

'Shot through the head with balled brains
Shot blind with eyes'⁹¹.

At his birth, as in 'Two Legends', 'everything went black', his first breath a 'bowel-emptying cry' that reverberates throughout the whole work, a death scream. 'Crow and Mama', first of many nightmare encounters with women, part parody of the baby Jesus with the Virgin Mary (there is a continuous parallel between Crow and Christ), describes a series of unwittingly destructive, comic attempts at escape,

'He tried a step, then a step, and again a step -
Every one scarred her face for ever'⁹².

This is all only a dream, or perhaps a never ending cycle, Crow reaches the moon only to be born again 'under his mother's buttocks'; indeed, this theme of the impossibility of escape echoes throughout the whole sequence, matched by Crow's own kind of anarchic, doomed freedom. In the final poem on Crow's birth, 'The Poop', man's body is merely earth, genitals its flower, mouth its creature, its only

opening the 'eye's pupil'. It is here that Crow settles, a life force that can separate man from earth, 'black doorway' to the soul. In the later 'Crow Rambles',

'Death only wants to be life. It cannot quite manage.

Weeping it is weeping to be life

(as for a mother it cannot remember)',⁹³.

Safely hatched, Crow is set against Death in a series of trial cosmologies. Each opens in Eden and culminates in Apocalypse, a painful progress towards godhead (albeit only over oblivion). In 'A Childish Prank', the young Crow cuts in half the serpent of Wodwo - 'God's only son' - to create human consciousness from sexual desire, a spur and a scourge. Life is created from stasis, Satan is ingested.

'Man awoke being dragged across the grass.

Woman awoke to see him coming',⁹⁴.

'Crow's First Lesson' continues the education both of Crow and Jahweh. Speech and love are outside Crow's range. He perverts them into further creation; the shark 'discovering' its own death', the mosquito that (literally) lives off flesh, and, worst of all, 'jabbering' man. Again, sex is a function of violence, the male is strangled by 'woman's vulva', the ultimate predator. God weeps, powerless, unable to impel language or love; Crow flies off, guiltily, to view the horror of his Creation. In 'Crow Aligns', mountains resemble cattle, the sea is a coiled snake and the stars are mushrooms while, conversely, man is reduced to mere externals - animate and inanimate inverted - a coat, a face, a hand, a cup. Life is thus mere 'hallucination', a garbage can in 'a waste of puddles', held in fealty to Crow.

'He stared at the evidence.

Nothing escaped him. (Nothing could escape)',⁹⁵.

In 'That Moment', the face of the previous poem - the final man - commits suicide (the first of many deaths); the world seems 'closed forever', an experiment ended, 'exposed to infinity'. Life is saved by Crow's voracity, in such desolation he has 'to start searching for something to eat'. Hunger leads to curiosity in 'Crow Hears Fate Knock on the Door'. He searches for inwardness - not the surfaces of 'Crow Aligns' - in the 'gobbets' of a mouse (the heavens' 'infinite engine') but his desire for full knowledge is the real inner, killing mechanism of the universe.

'This prophecy was inside him, like a steel spring

Slowly rending the vital fibres',⁹⁶.

In 'Crow Tyrannosaurus', you are what you eat. Hunger consumes self-knowledge, such

inwardness, such acuteness of sense for 'the eye's/roundness', 'the ear's/deafness'.

Now fully adult, albeit literally pre-historic - 'tyrannosaurus' - Crow can attempt communion with man, and thus advance towards godhead. 'Crow's Account of the Battle' extends food-lust to blood-lust, the simplicity of mass slaughter.-

'This had happened too often before

And was going to happen too often in future'⁹⁷.

Armageddon is made everyday 'like slamming a door'. Devoid of horror or any sense of pain, Crow merely evokes futility, losing even his masterful laughter - 'nobody smiled'. In 'The Black Beast', Crow again searches for death, the deity of such warfare, and destroys in turn his brother, the earth, and space. In vain he flails 'immensely through the vacuum'. A partial clue is given in 'A Grin', where this grimace of both ecstasy and absolute pain searches for a 'permanent home' in the temporary extremities of childbirth, terror, sex, grief and madness. It fails, and sinks back into death, the beneath-flesh, grinning, forgotten skull. 'Crow Communes' returns to digestion, greed transformed into love feast, a holy joke.

'Will this cipher divulge itself to digestion

Under hearing beyond understanding?'⁹⁸.

'Half-illuminated' (like the reader), Crow is strengthened from eating God's 'carcase' and yet still dumb, still 'appalled'. He is a priest obsessed with his own gross ugliness, his lack of inwardness - 'the hierophant, humped, impenetrable' - and this informs the stories he tells. In 'Crow's Account of St. George', England's patron saint sees 'the Universe...racing towards an answer' but is plagued by four dragons. He kills them bloodily, only to find that he has slain what he most loves;

'Drops the sword and runs dumb-faced from the house

Where his wife and children lie in their blood'⁹⁹.

'A Ritual' follows Christian ritual and a Christian saint with Christianity itself; a word (Logos) succeeds 'tweezers of number' as a false god, science yielding to linguistics. The 'word' is another monster, a ravenous mouth that is again dumb - 'earless, eyeless', able to devour men but not the (Goddess) earth, sucking it dry.

'All that remained of it a brittle desert

Dazzling with the bones of earth's people'¹⁰⁰.

Crow, who has flown clear of its ravages, scavenges its victims - 'he ate well'. He takes on language direct in 'The Battle of Osfrontalis', treating its temptations

the disdain of Christ in the wilderness; 'Crow took a sip of water and thanked heaven'. Neither bribes nor warfare - 'glottal bomb', 'guerrilla labials' - can give language victory; repulsed, speech retreats 'into the skull of a dead jester', poor Yorick. Crow too can play Hamlet, however, 'long ago/he had picked that skull empty'. Language is redundant, it masters Creation but 'the world did not notice', and power resides still with Crow. In 'Crow's Theology', he at last understands his survival, a kind of language set against death, a function of the sleeping God.

'... he realized that God spoke Crow -
Just existing was His revelation'¹⁰¹.

And yet there is a second, more evil, more powerful God, speaking stone and the silence of death, loving not Crow but the bullets that would kill him; a God

'... much bigger than the other
Loving his enemies
And having all the weapons'¹⁰².

The next seven poems are moves toward this second God, to the destruction of the first trial cosmology. In 'Crow's Fall', the blackness of 'Two Legends' is given an alternative, or prior, explanation. Crow envies the sun's whiteness, attacks and falls through pride (a proto-Adam), yet 'charred black' croaks 'a defiant paradox'.

"Up there", he managed,
'Where white is black and black is white, I won'¹⁰³.

Laughter is an attack, blackness a virtue. 'Crow and the Birds' sets Crow apart not through colour but greed (again); nobler birds avoid the debris of Nature or man; only he can happily, ungracefully, spraddle in 'beach garbage', scavenging 'ice-cream'. Similarly alone is the anti-hero of 'Criminal Ballad', narrated by Crow. Violence is a comic counterpart to each stage of his growing - 'an unconscious criminality' - just as tragedy turns into farce, original sin into Crow's (and his God's) amoral grin:

'And under the leaves he sat weeping
Till he began to laugh'¹⁰⁴.

The first element to fully disconcert Crow is the sea. In 'Crow on the Beach', he grips tight mother earth aware of something alien, deadening entropy. The sea's 'ogreish outcry and convulsion' recalls that cry of cosmic anguish in 'Two Legends' and 'A Kill'; the battle lines of Crow are indeed drawn. 'The Contender' presents a different kind of hurt. Christ is recrucified, self-tortured with the 'nails of nothing'. He ignores the gifts of Creation to grin, through decay, into eternity:

'Sometimes with eyes closed

In his senseless trial of strength'¹⁰⁵.

Myth is further debunked in 'Oedipus Crow'. Crow escapes death three times, though he loses in turn his guts, a foot and his brains, only to succumb at last to his master Death, tricked by his apparent friend 'the watch on his wrist'. Time passes 'in a cloud of corpse-dust', entropy again brings dissolution. In the first of many para-deaths, Crow dangles (like the hung crows of 'November') warned, brutally 'corrected', like Oedipus a victim of circumstances. 'Crow's Vanity' similarly revisits Greek myth and refracts it; Achilles' shield becomes Crow's 'evil mirror', his reflection - 'the usual grinning face' - turns into a new, bitter creation.

'And here came the misty ballerinas

The burning gulfs the hanging gardens it was eerie'¹⁰⁶.

The first Creation has faded into parody, false light darkens to a Crow-like black.

Such despair characterises the second Creation, declining to a long dark night of the soul. 'A Horrible Religious Error' sets the scene, the serpent of 'A Childish Prank' displaces God as an object of veneration, 'the sphinx of the final fact'. God (like his son, 'The Contender') turns grin into grimace, Adam and Eve collapse into worship, and only Crow resists being mesmerised. Saved again by greed, he

'Grabbed this creature by the slackskin nape,

Beat the hell out of it, and ate it'¹⁰⁷.

The next five poems continue this assault on chaos. 'Crow tries the Media' attempts to sing love but croaks - like a crow - despair, a failed evocation, 'her shape dimmed'¹⁰⁸. Throat is strangled, tongue poisoned, voice polluted, and so creation fails; in 'Crow's Nerve Fails', a crow's black plumage is archive of the 'living dead'.

'His prison is the earth. Clothed in his conviction

Trying to remember his crimes'¹⁰⁹.

With such a legacy of ghosts and their curses, Crow flies 'heavily'. 'In Laughter' narrates this constant death, a comic-book catalogue of slapstick that suddenly turns into torment, a fully human guilt 'like somebody the police have come for'. In 'Crow Frowns', grin once again becomes grimace, the frown of self-investigation part of his strange detachment that can 'assail infinity'. Created from 'nothing',

'He is the long waiting for something

To use him for some everything'^{III},

challenging entropy with his own lack of decay. Crow's hunger is a cleansing wind,

his footprints are 'signatures' of past for a distant future. 'Magical Dangers' emphasises the risk of confronting entropy, 'nature's stupor'. These attempts at creation dismember Crow, comfort is unmasked as death - 'soft and warm' a blindfold, intellect mere 'fruitless bars'. In a second para-death, he too succumbs to torpor, 'Crow never again moved'. Such chaos is resolved, in 'Robin Song', through legend. Robin is the analogue of Crow and his (second, greater) God, maker of a harsh world

'That rolls to crush
And silence my knowledge'^{II2}.

The lost king of 'Crow's Theology', his future deity in 'Crow Frowns', robin is a 'hunted king/of the frost and big icicles', exiled in winter, child of the storm;

'Who goes through me looking for something else
Who can't recognize me though I cry'^{II3}.

Heartened by his maker, Crow reasserts his endless sense of life, his eternity. In 'Conjuring in Heaven', the 'nothing' of inertia is a magical trick, a desired sleight of hand - 'prolonged applause in Heaven' at such cleverness - that, in the real, unexpected illusion can nevertheless contain Crow, stumped but undefeated.

'It hit the ground and broke open -
There lay Crow, cataleptic'^{II4}.

II5

'Crow goes Hunting' sees hunted turn hunter, the victor over language using words to test out his creation - 'Crow was Crow without fail, but what is here!'. The answer is flux, Nature a succession of cunning, magical transformations (more conjuring); using a determination and hunger learnt from Crow to defeat him, dumb in delight -

'Crow gazed after the bounding hare
Speechless with admiration'^{II6}.

In 'Owl's Song', hope is again resurgent. The owl which earlier had 'sailed clear of tomorrow's conscience' now sings of entropy, all life and emotion atrophied -
^{II7}
'everything had nothing more to lose' - yet contradicted by such expressiveness, 'his own singing'. Robin and Owl represent the two presiding divinities, Crow's God and the God of Eden. The latter is 'still with fear' at Crow's quiet omniscience,

'Seeing the clawtrack of star
Hearing the wingbeat of rock'^{II8},

the former is still in control, even at the heart of nothing. 'Crow's Undersong' is the first acknowledgement of Crow's mate, created by this greater God, a catalyst for the sexual conjunctions that are to transform the later poems of Crow. She

feels, initially, self-doubt and a sense of limits - 'she cannot come all the way' - a mirror of Crow's own insecurity rather than his hope. Singing but dumb, she brings both pain and (its adjunct) life into the universe, counterpart of Crow's ambivalence.

'And there would have been no crying in the city
(There would have been no city)',¹¹⁹.

Such knowledge brings sexuality, 'she has become amorous it is all she has come for'. In 'Crow's Courtship', added later, the secondary God's attempt at creating the same companion is doomed to failure - she must evolve slowly, naturally - and Crow's impatience matches Jahweh's incompetence, 'laminations of hag' burnt to a cinder.

'Crow stared wooden-eyed at the heap of ashes.

'The worst moment!', God wept, 'The worst moment'¹²⁰.

The nature of the first, true God is symbolised in 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song'. When beautiful - 'ageless eyes of innocence and kindness' - his refusal, like Jesus, to 'correct the damned' leads to his murder. Resurrected, himself a god, Elephant builds a clumsy armour, 'aged eyes' now 'wicked and wise', and deserts the hyenas to their sleepless hell to celebrate a lost Eden beyond his Creation's reach.

'And the Elephant sings deep in the forest-maze
About a star of deathless and painless peace
But no astronomer can find where it is',¹²¹.

'Dawn's Rose', the turning point of Crow, moves toward this star, this elegant domain. The dawn of a new era is starting, however 'desolate' the present - 'agony under agony' - its herald a crow (shorn of capital and mythic status) 'talking to stony skylines'. Its battle cry is 'wordless' birth and death, 'a newborn baby's grieving'

'Or the suddenly dropped, heavily dropped
Star of blood on the fat leaf',¹²².

Sunshine 'is melting an old frost moon', the Goddess yields to her ruined kingdom.

Resurgence continues; after 'Robin Song', any direction is upwards. In 'Crow's Playmates', the gods - like Jahweh - are merely a device to alleviate his loneliness, but they tear free like hyenas, each subtracting 'its lodging place and its power'. Thus cannibalised, reduced to 'his own leftover', robbed of what he can imagine, Crow

'Wandered over his deathless greatness
Lonelier than ever',¹²³.

cautious and betrayed as Elephant. He gains revenge over such gods in 'Crowego', deriving (literal) sustenance from dead myths - Ulysses as serpent, Hercules burnt,

Grendel avenged. Crow is his own black book of 'solid ink', gazing into the past

'Like a gypsy into the crystal of the future,
Like a leopard into a fat land'^{I24}.

'The Smile' is a further source of visions and plunder. A function of the real (hidden) God, the smile outflanks human subterfuge - 'mirrors of ricochet'-and comes from an ancient past, 'the oldest forest', to rule all creation, corpse to cosmos,

'Mending everything
Before it swept out and away across the earth'^{I25}.

If this subtly parallels the Crucifixion, the crowd pressing for a 'glimpse of a man's soul/stripped to its last shame', then Resurrection is achieved in 'Crow Improvises'. Alchemy is a series of electric shocks, burning away Crow's senses, confronting 'birth-sneeze' and 'death-chill'. The smile is thus liberated, it flies

'... off into the air, the rubbish heap of laughter,
Scream, discretions, indiscretions etcetera'^{I26},

a hard-won cure for entropy. 'Crowcolour' returns to Crow's blackness to similarly revalue it as a form of strength, something far beyond the token dark of 'moon's shadow'. Rather it is light on the other side of despair, a new sunlit vision blacker/than any blindness'^{I27}. Such paradox continues into 'Crow's Battle Fury'. Pain yields to laughter, mortality is stitched into a new birth, and Crow limps forward (like Frankenstein's new made monster) to meet his Creation.

'He comes forward a step,
and a step,
and a step - '^{I28}.

This acceptance by Crow of his blackness, his essential pain, is incorporated into the third, hierarchic creation myth of Crow. In 'Crow Blacker than Ever', the secondary God of Eden is forcibly joined to man, a nailed incarnation on earth.

'So man cried, but with God's voice.
And God bled, but with man's blood'^{I29}.

Crucifixion brings only agony here, 'a horror beyond redemption'. Crow grins in fealty to his Lord - the dark made manifest - 'flying the black flag of himself'. 'Revenge Fable' emphasises this new morality. To kill mother earth (the Goddess), scouring her with 'bulldozers and detergents', is to murder one's deepest self; 'his head fell off like a leaf' (prefigured in the blood-splattered conifer of 'Dawn's Rose')^{I30}. 'A Bedtime Story' presents another kind of failed Creation.

Crow narrates a second fable, of an 'intermittent' man who lacks his crucial timing - 'the photographs were blurred' - either for success or tragedy, his self-possession:

'But somehow his arms were just bits of stick
Somehow his guts were an old watch-chain'^{I31}.

Conversely, Jahweh's attempts to destroy Crow result in new alchemy, a creativity pointedly denied God in 'Crow Blacker than Ever'. Crow is the lost philosopher's stone, hammered into gold, hung on a tree for fruit, and buried to make man. Thus triumphant over crucifixion and resurrection, he makes a new, vengeful 'Redeemer'.

'When God went off in despair
Crow stropped his beak and started in on the two thieves'^{I32}.

'Crow Sickened' continues his education even in illness (schizophrenia?), searching Crow's own psyche for death and thus walking 'into his ambush'. Blind with fear, Crow attacks only to find the enemy is himself, death his weapon against entropy -

'With all his strength he struck. He felt the blow,
Horrificed, he fell'^{I33}.

In 'Song for a Phallus', this brutality is transferred to Greek myth, conveying the child's apprehension of sex. Through nursery obscenities, Crow relates attempts to emasculate the young Oedipus both by his father - 'Daddy had the word from God' - and the Sphinx, opening 'wide her maw', her sexuality. Oedipus kills both, only to return to his mother's womb; suffering is circular not a progress into meaning.

'He found himself curled up inside
As if he had never been bore
Mamma Mamma'^{I34}.

The poem concludes with a baby's first words, creation an endless, dark riddle^{I35}.

The fourth trial creation develops such violent, painful sexuality further. 'Apple Tragedy' posits a looking-glass Eden, Satan usurping God, Jahweh playfully winning back control through the apple, an alcoholic knowledge of good and evil. Cider thus unlocks sexual licence and, subsequently, drunken remorse. Eve seduces, then in turn fears the snake, an inhibition fueled by Adam. All leads to entropy.

'And God says: 'I am well pleased'
And everything goes to hell'^{I36}.

This impasse continues into 'Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural'. 'The ghost of a great general', Crow waits for battle. Art freezes creation, history chokes myth, and the 'fright-glare' of nuclear holocaust merges into primeval terror,

'The still-warm, stopped brain of a just-dead god
Trying to speak'^{I37}.

In 'Crow's Last Stand', the only survivor of this holocaust is Crow's eye-pupil, 'in
the tower of its scorched fort', black against a spectrum of flame.^{I38} A still crueller
opponent is faced in 'Crow and the Sea'. Water resists all overtures - an alien
world, 'bigger than death' - and yet it will not be ignored, Crow a failed Messiah.

'He turned his back and he marched away from the sea
As a crucified man cannot move'^{I39}.

The battle continues into 'Crow's Song about Prospero and Sycorax', added later.
Crow is set against the sea, male versus female, and entropy is defeated only by
combining such aggression into mutual sexuality, mortality into orgasm, thus

'easier to live with -
His death and her death'^{I40}.

With 'Truth Kills Everybody', battle is again joined. Proteus, the mythic shape-
changer of the sea, is pursued escalating horrors - shark, electric shock, 'Christ's
hot pounding heart' - all successfully outfaced. It is the 'hand grenade' of earth
that proves deadly, just as Proteus brings sea mysteries to dry land;

'Stinking with sea-bottom growths
Like the plug of the earth's sump-outlet'^{I41}.

Crow is blasted to nothing. In 'Crow and Stone' he bounces back into life, into
mastery (albeit only over earth), a monster holding 'the very globe in terror'.
Stone batters itself into dust, Crow merely grows nimbler. The survivor of so many
apparent deaths, yet 'who never has been killed', still in terms of self-knowledge

'Croaks helplessly
And is only just born'^{I42},

ready for Apocalypse. 'Fragment of an Ancient Tablet' celebrates the Goddess's
duality between appearance and the underlying thrust of life, face and vagina:

'Above - the face, shaped like a perfect heart.
Below - the heart's torn face'^{I43}.

Out of suffering comes new life, 'gouts of blood' prefigure 'the ticking bomb of the
future'. If that bomb was earth in 'Truth Kills Everybody', then in 'Notes for a
Little Play' it is nuclear catastrophe. In 'darkness of the sun', bodies burn to
nothingness 'with all the rubbish of the earth'; all that remain are two mutations
savagely copulating, Crow's greed transformed into a desperate quest for life.

'They fasten together. They seem to be eating each other.

But they are not eating each other'^{I44}.

In this spoiled Eden, Adam and Eve - 'hairy and slobbery, glossy and raw' - contract a simple marriage from the heart of despair, beyond Jahweh, 'without guest or God'.

Crow has cleared the way for the fifth, and final, trial creation, emerging from such sexuality, such darkness. 'Snake Hymn' celebrates 'the love that cannot die', conversely 'an empty husk' here beyond suffering (beyond human relevance). Sex is the final ruler of Eden - snake, Adam's blood and Christ 'knotted on the cross are all its servants - the Fall in effect is triumph rather than tragedy. In 'Lovesong', love is again 'appetite', a possessiveness, a joyful crucifixion;

'Her eyes wanted nothing to get away

Her looks nailed down his hands his wrists his elbows'^{I45}.

Metaphors deepen into the sinister, redolent of treachery and imprisonment - 'the grinding of locks' - copulation embraces pain as well as ecstasy (unlike in unreal Eden). If the lovers' 'little cries fluttered into the curtains', then also 'their screams stuck in the wall'. The Oedipal imbalance of 'Song for a Phallus'^{I46} is thus righted. Their two heads are a 'lopped melon' - like Mammy's - again made whole, a genuine communion of love (Agape) through lust, through surrender of self to other.

'In their entwined sleep they exchanged arms and legs

In their dreams their brains took each other hostage

In the morning they wore each other's face'^{I47}.

His principles thus taught to man, Crow can become a god, albeit only over oblivion.

'Glimpse' ironically makes such fertility both Crow's death and his apotheosis; the leaf's edge that 'guillotined language' (as in 'Crow Communes') also confers divinity.

'Speechless he continued to stare at the leaves

Through the god's head instantly substituted'^{I48}.

The scourge of worn-out mythologies is himself part of a new, tougher myth, a hymn to the hidden Creator. Silence becomes its own kingdom in 'King of Carrion'. Crow - stronger than death in 'Examination at the Womb-door' - returns as scavenger and as death's final plaything; his palace is 'of skulls', his throne a 'scaffold of bones',

'His crown is the last splinter

Of the vessel of life'^{I49}.

He rules an empty world. The swelling cry of 'Two Legends' departs, shrunk and silent, into entropy, 'the blindness and dumbness and deafness of the gulf'.

A similarly inert world - Waste Land revisited - is brought into creation in 'Two Eskimo Songs'. In 'Fleeing from Eternity', man is death's ghost; faceless he gashes out holes for eyes; impotent he tricks woman of her birthright.

'He saw a woman singing out of her belly.

He gave her eyes and a mouth, in exchange for the song'¹⁵⁰.

Her blood and pain bring life, his laugh is the last vestige of God's cosmic joke.

'How Water Began to Play' finds Crow's old enemy the sea also a victim of entropy.

'Water wanted to live

It went to the sun it came weeping back'¹⁵¹.

Water can find only death - 'maggot and rottenness' - even in the womb. It retreats through the 'stone door' of earth (which, in 'The Door', was Crow's first home) to become, like Crow, lord of oblivion, weeping away emotion until it reaches purity;

'It lay at the bottom of all things

Utterly worn out utterly clear'¹⁵².

'Littleblood', the final and most beautifully enigmatic poem in Crow, reveals the complex birth that follows such painful conception - 'the pain and blood were life' - Crow's tenacious legacy. Littleblood hides in the mountains, 'wounded by stars', like primitive man 'eating the medical earth' (the dust of 'Crow and Stone'),

'Ploughing with a linnet's carcass

Reaping the wind and threshing the stones'¹⁵³.

Similarly, littleblood represents the whole animal kingdom - gnat's feet, elephant's nose, crocodile's tail¹⁵⁴. Like Crow, it can instruct both poet and mankind as a whole, a direct line to the wellsprings of myth, dragging life from death's jaws:

'Grown so wise grown so terrible

Sucking death's mouldy tits.

Sit on my finger, sing in my ear, O littleblood'¹⁵⁵.

In Crow, Hughes has created a totem for the English race. The King James Bible and a whole library of myth are brought back to life; retold in a disjointed, ugly and violent way as if a crow were to speak, its harsh song made verse, its blackness a world-view, its hunger a philosophy. Crow turns evangelist - relating the struggle to survive the creation of matter - to emerge as 'littleblood', the ancestor of man. Crow's main opponent is entropy, the running down of the universe posited¹⁵⁶ by Einstein. It is Crow's very vitality, albeit at times ugly or violent, that proves his (and our) salvation, a Messiah for a nuclear age, a new myth for a world in ruins.

Like more communal, less personal myth, Crow has evolved its own apocrypha^{I57}, its own imitations^{I58}, its own parodists^{I59}. For Hughes himself, it seems to have released the floodgates, a vast recent body of work that moves ever closer to the Goddess, mistress of Littleblood, the underlying deity of Crow. In his text for Peter Brook's production of Orghast^{I60}, Hughes invented a new language to properly express this composite myth, an arcane ritual re-enacted at the tomb of Xerxes, yet

'the interior mythology of the play is of a piece with parts of my earlier writing; at the level of generalization, on which this myth works, the writings of most poets are one system and the same'^{I61}.

Thus, Jahweh becomes Krogon; the son in time of Orghast (creative fire) and Moa (the womb), he imprisons the world. It is Pramanath's (Prometheus's) duty to oppose him, the vulture is merely holy fire mistaken for a serpent, emerging as Anath, the lost divinity of Crow, the White Goddess. Prometheus on his Crag reworks these themes in English, a shrunken numb world in which Prometheus muses on the vulture, escapes earth for godhead (Hughes' Moly, Greek myth is made current and so eternal).

'He sways to his stature
And balances. And treads
On the dusty peacock film where the world floats'^{I63}.

Cave Birds^{I64} extends the myth still further, protagonist as life-denying sceptic, as Socrates, as 'civilised man'^{I65}. Condemned to death and consigned to the underworld, he is reborn as (a) crow, undergoing initiation into a true marriage with woman - 'owl flower' of the Mabinogion, the Goddess - rising as a king, as a falcon;

'In the wind-fondled crucible of his splendour
The dirt becomes God'^{I66}.

Crow is indeed unkillable, the parson of autumn in Season Songs, the singing survivor^{I67}
^{I68} of Moon-Bells, turning Adam into Phoenix in 'Adam and the Nine', waking him to life-

'Who has understood the Crow's love-whisper?
Or the Crow's news?'^{I69}.

Conversely, Crow has also enabled Hughes to re-enter Nature and landscape to celebrate this Goddess, not through myth but legend, a redefinition of beauty through horror, life through death. Season Songs^{I70} affirms the redemptive powers of the Goddess, of earth, from Spring's majesty through to its promise, heat against cold;

'The hare strays down the highway
Like a root going deeper'^{I71}.

Remains of Elmet^{I72} returns to the poet's own childhood landscape, suffused by legend and history, harsh, abidingly ancient. Evoked by sombre photographs (sired by Positives on Mercian Hymns), the poems are equally monochrome, a lament both for mother and native earth - 'Elmet, the last British Celtic kingdom to fall to the Angles' - united in the ominous, closing dream of an iron angel, yet also a seed

'Of the wild god now flowering for me
Such a tigerish, dark, breathing lily
Between the tyres, under the tortured axles,^{I73}

Industry yields fully to Nature in Moortown^{I74}, pages from a farmer's diary, the daily struggle to keep sheep and cattle alive, the business of survival, of harvest.

'The tall loads are swaying towards their barns
Down the deep lands,^{I75}

Elmet, 'an empty town, in the North of England', is the setting of Hughes' most extraordinary work so far, Gaudete^{I76}. Ritually sacrificed^{I77}, riven in two, it is Lumb's duty to heal the ailing Goddess. Thus, one Lumb introduces Dionysian orgy on earth (only to be destroyed by it), the other disappears into Nature, a modern Parzival, to reinvigorate the Waste Land. He emerges, like the risen Christ, to innocent children - the new Age - leaving not 'traces of red mud' but a handful of strange hymns to a 'nameless female deity', the restored Goddess. He also bequeaths a miracle, an otter summoned from the lough's depths, a metaphor for her Creation,

'the great world itself, this giant, shining beauty that God whistled up
up out of the waters of chaos ... an infinite creature of miracles'^{I78}.

Like Hill's attempts at national legend in Mercian Hymns, Hughes is undertaking the work of a civilization - not, like Heaney, merely synthesising it, or, like Gumm, simply investing it with new meaning - and creating a new structure of his own. This itself can comment on, and incorporate, older myths and legends as well as providing a satisfactory cosmology of its own. If Hughes' narrative structure is less involved or intrinsically satisfying than, say, Paradise Lost or Blake's Prophetic Books, at least he has the same breadth of ambition. Such myth does not lapse back disappointed into naturalism, but re-infuses his whole work, a new creation:

'My main concern was to produce something with the minimum cultural accretions of the museum sort ... it might be invented after the holocaust ...^{I79}
where essential things spring again ... only from their seeds in nature'.

All four poets have garnered such a harvest, the vellspring both of poetry and myth.

1. Dick Davis, 'Perceiving what is', PN Review 15 (Vol 7, No 1), 1980, pp60-1.
2. See Alan Bold, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, Edinburgh 1976, pp1-15 'Ted Gunn'. Bold traces their increasing divergence, but the continuing publication of their joint Selected Poems London 1962 still associates one with the other.
3. Dick Davis, p 61.
4. See Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes 2nd ed. 1978; Hughes was oblivious of the 'Movement', 'wrapped up as he was in the exclusive world of the White Goddess (p 14), he supplied Sylvia Plath 'with a fully worked out belief in the poetic mythology of Robert Graves' The White Goddess, it permeates his whole system of beliefs. See chapter one for a brief discussion of the book.
5. Ted Hughes, A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, London 1971, p 187.
6. Egbert Faas, 'Ted Hughes and Crow' (a conversation); London Magazine n.s. Vol 10, No 10, Jan 1971, p 6. The quotation continues

'Is Mary violent? Yet Venus in Shakespeare's poem ... eventually murdered Adonis she murdered him because he rejected her. He was so desensitised, stupified and brutalised by his rational scepticism, he didn't know what to do with her. He thought she was an ethical peril!'.
 ...
7. Plato, banisher of the poets from his Republic, nevertheless would give children not a grounding in ethics but a proper grounding in the Greek myths.
8. Cf the same idea in Idries Shah, The Sufis, London 1974.
9. Ted Hughes, 'Myth and Education', Childrens Literature in Education 1, 1970, p67.
10. John Heilpern, Conference of the Birds; the story of Peter Brook in Africa, London 1977, p 268.
11. See Al Alvarez, The Savage God London 1971, a personal view of suicide and Plath.
12. Faas, p 11.
13. Translated into English as The Tibetan Book of the Dead, compiled and edited by W.Y.Evans-Wentz, London 1927, 3rd ed. 1957 with a 'psychological commentary by C.G.Jung. At one time Hughes planned to produce this as an opera with the Chinese composer Chou Wen-chung.
14. See Mircea Eliade, Shamanism, London 1964.
15. Faas p 16.
16. 'Myth and Education', Writers, Critics and Children, New York 1976, (ed. Fox et al). This is a complete rewriting of the original - more lively - talk, the same basic ideas, a completely new expression of them.
17. 'If the story is learned well ... then that story has become like the complicated hinterland of a single word' (p 80).

18. Ibid p 94.
19. At Cambridge, Hughes changed from English to Archaeology and Anthropology - he had already had as tutor J.C.Hodgart, an expert in the ballads - and Sagar quotes (p 8) the remarkable dream, a fox's warning, which persuaded the poet that his creative work was best served by such a move. Along with Nathaniel Tarn, Hughes is one of the few poets scholastically trained in primitive myth.
20. The ideas in the Faas interview, for example, are hardly rigidly academic.
21. The same, of course, applies to Yeats' A Vision and indeed Graves' The White Goddess (see chapter one). It is almost as if such theories soak up the detritus of the poet's mind, leaving the creative work clear, magisterial.
22. Faas, p 17.
23. See John Sladek, The New Apocrypha: a guide to strange science and occult beliefs, London 1973 pp 120-21. Cayce was an all-purpose mystic, advising on 'matters of health, religion, philosophy, man's non-descent from the monkey, Atlantis, the Great Pyramid, automatic writing, astrology, warnings in dreams, reincarnation and all other subjects of occult interest, not forgetting (regular bowel movements)'.
24. Sagar, 2nd ed. p 225. Sagar is also an expert on Lawrence, the author of a biography, the editor of his letters as well as writing The Art of D.H.Lawrence, Cambridge 1966.
25. See Richard de Mille, Castaneda's Journey, New York 1976, London 1978.
26. Despite his imposture, Castaneda's work is true on a deeper level, Don Juan a vehicle of the poetry of Don Juan - Saint John - of the Cross, a new spiritual direction for modern man disguised in the myth of a peyote Indian.
27. Geoffrey Thurley, The Ironic Harvest: English poetry in the twentieth century, London 1974, p 172. Nevertheless, such establishment figures as W.H.Auden, Stephen Spender and Marianne Moore awarded him a First Publication prize in New York, such an establishment publisher as Faber avidly took his work.
28. Al Alvarez, 'The New Poetry, or Beyond the Gentility Principle', The New Poetry, ed. Alvarez, Harmondsworth 1962, rev. ed, 1966.
29. Calvin Bedient, 'On Ted Hughes', Critical Quarterly Vol 14, No 2 (Summer 1972) p 113.
30. Claud Rawson, 'Ted Hughes: A Reappraisal' Essays in Criticism Jan 1965, quoted Sagar, p 35 (his paraphrase).
31. Faas p 11. See, however, the attack on Hughes in Eric Homberger, The Art of the Real: poetry in England and America since 1939, London 1977, stressing his anti-democratic, almost proto-fascist political stance. Certainly he remains an outsider, a solitary in the world of men.
32. Hughes is as obsessed with solitude as Gunn is with community.

33. The Hawk in the Rain, London 1957. In my discussion of Hughes' work, the excellence of Keith Sagar's comprehensive study The Art of Ted Hughes, Cambridge 1975, 2nd revised ed. 1978, - and shortage of space - precludes a full, poem by poem, analysis, as with Heaney, Hill and Gunn. I shall concentrate on Crow.
34. See Faas p II-13. The same attempt on the universal through dialect can be discerned in the mature work of Alan Garner, whose fictions closely approach Hughes verse - respect for the Goddess, affinity with the primeval, a strong sense of (Northern) place, synthesis of a wide body of myth into something new, strange, fiercely personal. See The Owl Service, London 1967.
35. Introduction to Keith Douglas, Selected Poems ed. Ted Hughes, London 1964. Hughes also owes a substantial poetic debt to Dylan Thomas, Gerald Manley Hopkins, John Crowe Ransome, masters all of the harsh line, the spiky conceit.
36. Hughes obviously subscribes neither to Donald Davie's Purity of Diction in English Verse, London 1952 nor to the later Articulate Energy: an enquiry into the syntax of English poetry, London 1957. He thus derives vehement energy at the occasional expense of meaning - the last 5 lines of 'The Hawk in the Rain' make no grammatical sense at all, syntax as smashed as the crashing hawk.
37. The Hawk in the Rain p II.
38. Ibid p I2.
39. Hughes' father filled the poet's childhood with his reminiscences of the Great War, such horrors have entered the very fabric of his poetry. See Bold p II.
40. The Hawk in the Rain p 34. In 'The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar' fire is a means of testing, of validating the efficacy of mere words, 'smoke burned his sermons into the skies'.
41. See Sagar p 23, quoting The White Goddess p 448. As in the Mabinogion, and indeed The Owl Service (see note 34), the Goddess brings both grace and despair, 'She is the Flower-Goddess Olwen or Blodeuwedd, but she is also Blodeuwedd the Owl, lamp-eyed, hooting dismally, with her foul nest in...a dead tree'.
42. The Hawk in the Rain p I9. 'Song' was written, astonishingly, while Hughes was still at school (see Sagar p 8), his most darkly beautiful poem - quietly and carefully rhymed - a continuation of the sensuous despair of late Keats, 'The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores' ('Bright Star').
43. Lupercal, London 1970.
44. Ibid p 42. The colonel's head is mounted, by Hughes, with wolf and sturgeon, also fierce predators, also extinct.
45. Ibid p 46. In a recent reading, Hughes claimed that part II of this poem was written, through Hughes, by the spirit of his ouija board (see also Sagar p 39). One hopes that the spirit was granted royalties.

46. See 'Strawberry Hill', Walpole's Gothic toyed with such life, went down under it.
47. Lupercal p II. See Sagar p 46 for a fuller description of this abandoned myth.
48. A poem, like 'The Perfect Forms', where myth overwhelms reason. See Sagar pp 55-7.
49. 'Lupercalia' also took place in February. Cf 'November' (taking its 'tramp in the sodden ditch' from 'Things Present'), another part of seasonal myth-making.
50. Lupercal p 63. Lupercalia was a festival of fertility, dog and goat sacrificed, the barren women ritually whipped by athletes. The collection closes with a hope that the fruitfulness of Nature will invade humanity, a spiritual harvest.
51. Ibid p 60. It is Cleopatra, not Rome, that is the real victor.
52. See Sagar p 61. Unreliable and prying as most biographical speculation is, it seems unavoidable here. In Letters Home, London 1975, Plath indicates the mutual poetic debt of each to the other - see her Hughes-derived poem 'The Death of Myth-making', Poetry xciv (Sept. 1959) p 370 - and Hughes' early high productivity flows from this relationship. In bleak contrast, between February 1963 and 1966 Hughes wrote only 'The Howling of Wolves', 'Song of a Rat' and a long play which has never appeared, except as verse fragments. 'Cadenza' and 'Heptonstall' - where Plath is buried - seem subsequent attempts at atonement.
53. Recklings, London 1966 (limited edition of 150). 'Logos' reappears in Wodwo.
54. Wodwo, London 1967. The American edition - New York, 1967 - contains two extra poems, 'Root, Stem, Leaf' (three verses originally in Recklings) and 'Scapegoats and Rabies', published in England separately as a limited edition, London 1967.
55. Recklings p 17, 'Fallen Eve'. For a more humorous version of the snake myth, written for children (Hughes' purest myths) see Nessie the Mannerless Monster, London 1966. Cf also the earlier 'Mayday on Holderness', discussed earlier.
56. Wodwo p 149. Cf the sinister, cruel, supernatural smile of Crow p 62-3.
57. See The White Goddess p 465. The 'Word' is reduced to a child's first scream.
58. Wodwo p 150-3, 'Gog', cf. The White Goddess p 465, Logos again defeated, claiming 'to be dominant as Alpha and Omega ... pure Good, pure Logic, able to exist without the aid of women ... the outcome was philosophical dualism'.
59. Wodwo p 40, 'The Green Wolf' - effects of a stroke - cf The White Goddess p 69.
60. See The White Goddess pp 133, 293, 54. All are aspects of fertility.
61. i.e. 'Song of a Rat' begins where the short story 'Sunday' leaves off, 'The Rain Horse', a prose narrative, refers back to the poem 'November' in Lupercal - 'sodden as the bed of an ancient lake', rain smudging the farms, fields 'jumping'.
62. Wodwo p 182. Poet and daughter experience a moment of fulfilment, the quiet fertility of cows, the perceived mystery of the moon. It is again evoked for children, albeit more fantastically, less comfortably in The Earth-Cul and

other moon-people, London 1963.

63. Vasko Popa, Selected Poems, Harmondsworth 1969, introduction by Hughes, p 14.
64. Wodwo p 170. For further creation myths see the prose How the Whale became and other stories, London 1963 (principally for children) and, of course, Crow.
65. As in 'The Rescue', the resentful saved 'like mummies with their bandages...off'
66. Crow, London 1970. The 2nd ed, London 1972, contained 7 new poems...
67. Faas, p 16; Hughes earlier acknowledges, however, that
 'You spend a lifetime learning how to write verse when it's been clear from your earliest days that the greatest poetry in English is in the prose of the bible' (p 14).
68. See Sagar p 114 and Paul Radin, The Trickster, London 1956.
69. See The White Goddess p 87.
70. Ibid p 66, crow as Cronos, the murdered ritual king of the harvest.
71. Ibid p 143; 'the Morrigan was invoked in battle by an imitation on war-horns of a raven's croaking', she was the third part of the Triple-Goddess.
72. Cf the similarities between 'Truth kills Everybody' and the close of 'Tam Lin'.
73. Bold p 116.
74. Faas, p 18.
75. 'Poetry Now' broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 24 June 1970, quoted Bold p 117.
76. Faas p 20, 'a super-simple and a super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything except just what he wanted to say'.
77. See Sagar p 106, and sleeve notes to the Claddagh recording of Crow, 1973.
78. See Sagar p 235. Hughes gave the same explanation in a recent reading.
79. David Lodge, 'Crow and the Cartoons', Critical Quarterly Spring 1971, reprinted in Poetry Dimension I, ed. Jeremy Robson, London 1973, pp 30-39.
80. David Holbrook, Lost Bearings in English Poetry, London 1977, chapter 5, 'From 'Vitalism' to a Dead Crow, Ted Hughes' Failure of Confidence', p 147.
81. Geoffrey Thurley, The Ironic Harvest, London 1974, 'Beyond Positive Values: Ted Hughes' p 186. What Holbrook sees as an abandonment to the Absurd, Thurley sees as an important step in the English existential tradition, a proper use of myth.
82. Calvin Bedient, 'Absentist Poetry', PN Review I (1977) pp 23-4.
83. C.V. Fernandez, 'Crow, a Mythology of the Demonic', Modern Poetry Studies 6, Autumn 1975, p 144. The demonic has exhausted Christianity and Science but not Crow.
84. Peter Abbs 'The Revival of Mythopoic Imagination: A Study of R.S. Thomas and Ted Hughes', Poetry Wales 10, 4, 1975. Abbs is in the forefront of mythological criticism.

85. J. Brooks Bouson, 'A Reading of Ted Hughes' Crow', Concerning Poetry 7, 1974, pp21-32, see also Faas, p 17.
86. Ted Hughes, Eat Crow, London 1971; concluding lines of a one act play in which the hero Morgan is under attack by Prosecutor and the Goddess, written 1964.
87. The prose part of the epic is not yet published. I have used the most recent, commercially available edition (2nd English ed, London 1972) with three poems added in a limited, illustrated edition, London 1973.
88. Keith Sagar, Ted Hughes (Writers and their Work) 227 (1972), p 32.
89. Crow p 13. Natural crow here leads to mythic Crow in 'Lineage'.
90. See Faas pp16-7 on the Bardo Thodol, the Tibetan Book of the Dead which Hughes planned as a libretto, means of fully passing both womb and tomb door. See also W.Y.Evans-Wentz, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, London 1927, 3rd ed. 1957 with a psychological commentary by C.Y.Jung.
91. Crow p 16. See Sagar (1978) p 107.
92. Crow p 17, scarring the earth, the White Goddess.
93. 'Crow Rambles', Crow 1973 illustrated, limited ed.
94. Crow p 19. Crow laughs, precursor of the cosmic grin of his God.
95. Crow p 21. A pun on escape as 'did not notice', 'broke free'.
96. Crow p 23. The prophecy is 'a grimace', another precursor of the cosmic grin.
97. Crow p 27. This makes universal the Great War, one of Hughes' earliest myths.
98. Crow p 30. 'Agape' means not just 'open' but the Latin term for the Christian love-feast, communion turning Crow's natural greed into spiritual illumination.
99. Crow p 22.
100. Crow p 33.
101. Crow p 35. See footnote to Crow, Claddagh Records, 1973, part quoted Sagar p118
'Crow's whole quest aims to locate and release his own creator, God's nameless hidden prisoner, whom he both encounters repeatedly but in some unrecognisable form'.
102. Crow p 35. It is left unclear whose enemies he loves, his own or Crow's.
103. Crow p 36. A directly contrary creation myth to that in 'Two Legends'.
104. Crow p 39.
105. Crow p 42. The grin recurs, temporarily impotent.
106. Crow p 44. The mirror is also a fortune teller's crystal ball.
107. Crow p 45. Cf the equally welcome greed of 'Crow Communes'.
108. A contrast to 'Crow's Vanity', where such evocations came unplanned.

- I09. Crow p 47. Cf 'Crow Tyrannosaurus', again imprisoned in earth.
- I10. A development of an earlier, failed attempt at cosmic laughter, 'A Grin'.
- I11. Crow p 50. He is waiting for his lost God, Lord of such nothingness.
- I12. Crow p 52. Cf. the folklore spirit Robin Goodfellow, and a yet smaller sacrificial victim, the wren. Robin is not included in 'Crow and the Birds'.
- I13. Crow p 52.
- I14. Crow p 53.
- I15. As in 'The Battle of Osfrontalis'.
- I16. Crow p 54, speechless both in surprise and because deprived of speech.
- I17. 'Crow and the Birds', p 37.
- I18. Crow p 55.
- I19. Crow p 56. See Sagar pp127-30, another counterpart of the White Goddess.
- I20. 'Crow's Courtship', Crow 1973 illustrated, limited ed.
- I21. Crow p 58. For a variant creation myth see Hughes' prose narrative for children 'How the Elephant Became', How the Whale Became, and other stories, London 1963. Bombo saves all the other animals from a forest fire.
- I22. Crow p 59, shot by a gamekeeper?
- I23. Crow p 60. This loneliness will be relieved by Crow's mate.
- I24. Crow p 61. Dejanira was Hercules' wife, and accidentally poisoned him with the shirt of Nessus, in Beowulf the hero undertook quests against two dragons dwelling in a lake, Grendel and his mother.
- I25. Crow p 63. Cf the magical transformations of 'Crow goes Hunting'. The poem blends the narratives of 'A Grin' and 'A Disaster', Christ as the Word.
- I26. Crow p 65.
- I27. Cf the blackness of 'Two Legends', crow a 'black rainbow'.
- I28. Crow p 68.
- I29. Crow p 69.
- I30. Crow p 45, 'A Horrible Religious Error'; 'star of blood on the fat leaf' p 59. All three prefigure the godhead of 'Glimpse', leaf a guillotine at which he continues to stare 'at the god's head instantly substituted'.
- I31. Crow p 72. Cf that similar failed saviour in 'The Contender'.
- I32. Crow p 73.
- I33. Crow p 74, the nearest that Hughes gets to 'confessional' verse.
- I34. Crow p 77. Holbrook, pp155-58, takes this comic poem far too seriously.

- I35. The Sphinx's riddle from the Oedipus myth - man the strange creature who first crawls on four feet, then walks on two, finally uses a stick as a third support - is rather brutally answered here, wrested from her guts with an axe!
- I36. Crow p 78, God's approval a parody of His words in the gospel account of Christ's baptism by John the Baptist, the last of the prophets.
- I37. Crow p 79, the blackbird is a para-Crow, a more melodious songster.
- I38. Cf 'The Door' where the eye-pupil is Crow's first home. 'Burning/burning/burning' is of course a direct echo of that hall of echoes The Waste Land.
- I39. Crow p 82.
- I40. 'Crow's Song about Prospero and Sycorax', Crow 1973 limited, illustrated ed.
- I41. Crow p 83, cf. the magical transformations of a ballad like 'Tam Lin'; also cf. the shark of 'Crow's First Lesson', the electric shock of 'Crow Improvises'
- I42. Crow p 84, eyes again are all important, the power of sight.
- I43. Crow p 85, a variation of the riddle poem, augury of the Oracle.
- I44. Crow p 86. See Faas p 19, this describes the survivors of a nuclear explosion. Cf also the 'dark sun' of D.H.Lawrence, a vital influence on Hughes, both in belief in personal mythology and in a worship of life, the free spirit.
- I45. Crow p 88.
- I46. See Crow pp 75-7.
- I47. Crow p 89.
- I48. Crow p 90, cf the 'fat leaf' of 'Dawn's Rose', the lopped head falling off like a leaf in 'Revenge Fable'.
- I49. Crow p 91. There seems also a further reference to the Crucifixion, Christ and Crow united in suffering, in 'the hanged thing's/rack and final stretcher'.
- I50. Crow p 92.
- I51. Crow p 93.
- I52. Crow p 93, a kind of creation myth, 'How the Water Became'.
- I53. Crow p 94, littleblood becomes a harvester of Creation, farmer of the universe.
- I54. It is best not to attempt to visualise such a creature, Hughes' style can be easily ridiculed for it is not to be interpreted realistically but as myth.
- I55. Crow p 94.
- I56. See also Thomas Pynchon's short story 'Entropy', the Jerry Cornelius novels of Michael Moorcock. These again attempt to turn science into art, come to terms with a nuclear age.
- I57. For example 'Crow's Song about God', 'The Lovepet', 'Genesis of Evil', 'Crow the Just' and 'Crow's Song about England'. See Sagar's complete bibliography.

- I58. Most impressive is R.S.Thomas' artistic renaissance, H'm, London 1972.
- I59. Most humorous is George Macbeth, The Orlando Poems, London 1971.
- I60. See A.C.H.Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, London 1972.
- I61. Ibid p 97. Cf Brook's later project, the Sufi parable 'Conference of the Birds'.
- I62. Prometheus on His Crag, London 1973, reprinted in Moortown, London 1979.
- I63. Moortown p 92. 'Earth-numb' also continues the Crow apochrypha.
- I64. Cave-Birds, London 1975, revised and enlarged commercial ed., London 1978, both illustrated by Leonard Baskin, who provided much of the inspiration of Crow, as well as the later covers for Gaudete and Moortown.
- I65. See Hughes' note to A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, Adonis turning into Venus.
- I66. Cave Birds (1978 ed.) p 60, cf. Part 2 of Orghast, Hercules descends to the underworld to raise up the tyrant Holdfast (instead death gives up the vulture)
- I67. Season Songs, London 1976, pp 43-4; 'Leaves', 'I study the bible right down to the bone' claims Crow, parson of the fallen leaves.
- I68. Moonbells, London 1978, pp 29-30, 'Horrible Song', 'the Crow is a hardy creature'
- I69. Moortown, p 168.
- I70. Season Songs, London 1976, incorporating 5 Autumn Songs, Bow 1968.
- I71. Ibid p 74. Cf Moon-Bells, further poems for adult children, hymns to the Goddess - Sagar sees these as Songs of Innocence against Crow's Experience.
- I72. Remains of Elmet, London 1979. Photographs by Fay Godwin, a development of the collaboration first seen in Worlds, ed. G.Summerfield, Harmondsworth 1974.
- I73. Ibid. p 77. The place names are significant, Crow Hill, Lumb Valley.
- I74. Moortown Elegies, London 1978, commercial ed. Moortown, London 1979, including also poems from Moon-Bells and Michael Morpurgo, All Around the Year, London 1979, a diary of the working year of a new farmer.
- I75. Moortown 1979 ed. p 56.
- I76. Gaudete, London 1977. The title comes from a Christmas hymn, see Sagar p 168.
- I77. Hercules is thus sacrificed in The White Goddess p 125 (his ghost is the Crow God Bran), male counterpart of the Goddess as emblem of fertility. The two Lumbs are indicated in the poem's two epigraphs, Dionysos and Parzival,
- I78. Gaudete p 175.
- I79. Hughes, quoted Sagar (1978) p 107; 'if I couldn't find it again original in Crow, I wasn't interested to make a trophy of it'. The poet has made all myth synchronic, Crow a library of civilization, old ruins reconstructed in a new architecture, a new system.

C H A P T E R S I X .

P O E T R Y A N D M Y T H .

'Myth, then, may have to be re-defined for the twentieth century'¹.

'And yet. And yet. The great forest of ancient mythologies does beckon, and it still has its attractions'².

All this really takes us no further towards discovering why - rather than how - modern poets have returned to myth. We must turn again from analysis to theory. There seem to be two poles of experience running through post-war verse, the sacred and the profane, the numinous and the political, the mystical and the prosaic. In that masterpiece of committed Marxism, Illusion and Reality - a commitment learnt from the pulses not others' rhetoric - Christopher Caudwell traces the hardening of myth into religious dogma, the class divisions of nascent capitalism. Myth itself demands 'assent to the illogical' but presents 'man's confused knowledge of society and his relation to it', glimmerings of reality, steps toward communism:

'the phantastic world of poetic ritual, myth or drama expresses a social truth, a truth about the instincts of man as they fare, not in biological or individual experience, but in associated experience'.³

Alternatively, in her equally committed defence of metaphysics Defending Ancient Springs, Kathleen Raine sees myth not as outdated (partially correct) superstition but as endlessly valid, 'myth is the truth of the fact, not fact the truth of the myth'. Through an over-insistence on the detail and not the whole, the striking image and not the construction of a mythology, modern poetry lacks such unity as only myth can provide, the sense of Eden (or New Jerusalem), links with the psyche:

'as an alternative to a demythologised naturalism from which all the numinosity has been withdrawn, I would expect any profound renewal of poetry to come from an exploration of the interior, the anterior landscape of the imagination'.⁴

In the invaluable Agenda special issue on myth, John Heath-Stubbs unites these two warring theories, each an aspect of the other, both (and only) thus fulfilled:

'because myth is a means of exploring human potentiality, the poet must revalue experience, and become a revolutionary. Because myth is a way of relating meaningfully to the past and tradition the poet is always, in the true sense of the word, conservative'.⁵

Far from being destroyed by socialist realism (or Platonic mysticism), myth merely reveals it as yet another of its countless aspects, a symbol of man's oppression (or man's potential), a partial view. Indeed, to re-invigorate myth - whether it must be rescued from the Marxist (or Christian) index of forbidden texts, from the quicksands of academia, or from the nursery of child's fable - remains the mastering impulse of the greatest poetry, not to devise but rediscover, to link

psyche to society, the poet to his readers, each reader to one another.

'No-one can really invent new myths. It is a matter of selecting and recombining under high imaginative pressure from the mass of mythic material which most of us have forgotten ... myths which were ever true myth cannot die, since it is part of the definition of myth that it exists outside time, making intelligible the permanent realities',⁶.

In just the same way, myth has been incorporated stylistically into the four major poetic movements of this century, form mirroring function, reshaping perception. For the modernists, myth was integrated into collage, Eliot's fusion in The Waste Land of 'these fragments I have shored against my ruin' - Tarot cards, Holy Grail, Buddhist rebirth, the Golden Elizabethan Age-reflected in tight, packed verse.

'The horses, under the axeltree
Beat up the dawn from Istria
With even feet. Her shuttered barge
Burned on the water all the day',⁷.

In symbolist poetry, myth was not dispersed but concentrated into potent metaphor, Yeats' 'Leda and the Swan' standing, at once, for itself, the 'burning roof and towers' of Troy, the coming of the Christian age (analogue for the Incarnation), even a new sexuality - 'did she put on his knowledge with his power'. Again, 'Among School Children' makes convergent - where Eliot would have made divergent - a visit by a 'sixty-year⁵⁴ smiling public man', Leda, Maude Gonne and the moon changes of A Vision to create its own myth, a fusion of beauty and wisdom, tree and leaf,

'O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance',⁸.

For the surrealists, alternatively, myth was (used as) image, David Gascoyne's adoption, in 'Miserere', of the Crucifixion as a correlative for man's endless fall suffering brought brutally up to date (myth an archetype of human inhumanity),

'See, the centurions wear riding boots,
Black shirts and badges and peaked caps,
Greet one another with raised-arm salutes',⁹.

Movement realism, still prevalent, treats myth merely as reference, an outdated code on which, like parallel bars, to perform exercises - 'any god you like will
II
do to say/the things you like',¹⁰ - the past 'more remote than Ithaca', all lost -

'That ancient mythology has fallen;
Those runes and talismans diminish,
Toys for the fingers of foolish children',¹².

It is the Movement, not mythology, that is now an outdated toy, an outworn style; nevertheless, if myth is partly a function of form, then it can, in turn, modify content, shape the will to creation. I would suggest four basic motivations here. Firstly, myth can validate, justify even, the poet's private life, make art out of suffering. If Robert Lowell made his own background a legend¹³, self as tragic hero, and Sylvia Plath's later poems seemed what they so sadly were, advance notes for suicide,¹⁴ then confession had been turned into myth far earlier in George Painter's forgotten, haunting masterpiece The Road to Sinodun. The poet/narrator survives nervous breakdown - 'legendary encounters with his own doppelgänger - through his rediscovery, winter into spring, of Sinodun. Ancient myth can heal but, as befits this tart work, it silences - 'my future words all dumb' - it is partial,

'Day fades, I am lost and houseless,
Sinodun is far behind'¹⁵.

Secondly, myth can reinforce the bond between man and nature, poet and his landscape. In Briggflatts, Basil Bunting creates rich (fictional) biography, the poet as Bloodaxe - made one in the coda - to reinvigorate his own past; bull, mason and lost love, all 'paving the slowworm's way'. Such memories pursue him into exile, are modified, bull into minotaur, poet into slowworm. Chastened, an old man, he returns to his homeland at season's change - 'I hear Aneurin number the dead' - time blurred - 'today's posts are piles to drive into the quaggy past' - loss outfaced,

'Fifty years a letter unanswered;
a visit postponed for fifty years.
She has been with me fifty years'¹⁶.

Thirdly, myth can support the inner world against reason, the constraints of that society - ancient or communal - celebrated, say, in Briggflatts (a Northern myth). In 'Old Savage/Young City', Nathaniel Tarn opposes urban 'ceremonial pattern' to poet, 'magic artificer', who seeks instead commerce with the earth, his natural self;

'only the shaman frolicks, mocking his own mask,
whole capitals crumbling while he counts his fingers'¹⁷.

Indeed, idea is erected into polemic in Michael Horovitz's anthology Children of Albion,¹⁸ a heady brew of lost enthusiasm, 'the legacy of the whole man', unclaimed. Fourthly, and most ambitiously, myth can distill the emotional wisdom of a people, informed Mass Observation, the poet as priest, as scribe. In Night Thoughts,

David Gascoyne records a 'solitary stroller' awake in a world asleep (unconscious), a survivor of 'that great lost ship, The Day'. The stars, 'splinters of old myths', here must accede (Tarn reversed) to modern temples, - Battersea Power Station - 'raised to man-made Power and Light', dreams enter in gaudy carnival, despair ends.

'Greetings to the solitary ... We are closer to one another than we realize. Let us remember one another at night, even though we do not know each other's names'¹⁹.

Such hard-won revelations are further urbanised, the tribe moved to town, in Roy Fisher's City, Birmingham itself a tragic, suffering hero, a 'ghost ... among the spokes of the new'. Fisher cunningly merges prose and verse, reality and vision (as does Gascoyne), the city a 'composite monster' of its inhabitants, essentially unknowable - 'most of it has never been seen' - taking on a 'dry epic flavour, whose air is human breath'. People, too, become legendary - 'an eternally startled Adam, a permanently bemused Eve' - metamorphosis of steel into tree, man into myth

'Each thought is at once translucent and icily capricious. A polytheism without gods'²⁰.

City, thus tangentially, reveals the most potent need to drive post-war poets back to myth, a desire to recapture Eden, a lost world of perfection, the Golden Age. Just as in J.G. Ballard's strange imploded novel 'You, Me and the Continuum' - prose metamorphosing into poetry - Christ's Second Coming is botched, shattered,

'lost integers in a hundred computer codes, sand-grains on a thousand beaches, fillings in a million mouths'²¹,

in recent poetry Eden is both desired and yet found only as fragmented, failed, soiled by an eternal tawdriness. If Eliot could look back to a rich fullness now laid waste, if Yeats could dream of Byzantium, Heaney's bog-Ireland is dark and dangerous, Hill's Mercia cruel and arbitrary, Gunn's 'new men' to be reclaimed by the dust, Hughes' Crow greedy and evil, men merely his playthings. And yet the myth remains potent, nowhere more than in Moly, death subjugated to beauty -

'The constant vision of the race:
Lawned orchard deep with flower and fruit'²².

Edwin Muir provides the most coherent account of this search for Eden, its bitterness and its triumphs, in that unified work The Labyrinth - like Saul 'dark on the highway, groping in the light' - struggling towards illumination, to 'shine yet in your golden age'²³.

It remains only to refine definitions, to draw some final tentative conclusions. Legend is not merely localised, second-rate myth but a complex form of nostalgia, an attempt to recapture childhood landscapes, Eden traced back to the nursery. This lost domain is, inevitably, viewed from exile, absence making the legend grow fonder, more intense. Thus, for Heaney, Wintering Out ends with escape westwards to California, North - along with the more personal Stations - a view framed from the context of the South, the Wicklow of 'Exposure'. Again, Hill's portmanteau legend of the Midlands, Mercian Hymns, was crafted in Leeds, the poet's place of work for the last twenty-five years²⁴. For Gunn, Positives was written (admittedly in situ)²⁵ after a long sojourn in California, his more poignant, personal memories of a London childhood made legend later in Jack Straw's Castle: indeed the title poem sets its obsessive vision of endless rooms, space in the skull, around that same Hampstead landmark²⁶. In turn, Hughes endlessly recycles his brutal vision of death and life in a Pennine village - the (absurdly) aptly named Mytholmroyd - from the gentler vantage points of Mexborough, Cambridge, London and a thatched cottage in Devon.²⁷ Legend, therefore, can be (re)defined as a nostalgia for place - native land, native bones - the landscape a continuum.

Full myth adds a further dimension, a new parameter, 'the greater mystery of Time'²⁸. Moly celebrates, and perpetuates, myth as eternity of form, a pattern that runs throughout history - endlessly varied, endlessly the same - time made sense of through constant repetition. Crow instead treats myth as itself a vast historical survey, a narrative set deep in the past that explains the inexplicable present. Really the first is a function of the second, individual myths the building blocks of a mythology, manifestations within space and time of a pattern beyond either. The past is indeed lost, a foreign country, and only myth can fully recreate its complexity, its strangeness. The four processes earlier isolated - legend as archetype, new legend, myth as archetype, new myth - are not exclusive but progressive, a procession to the numinous that can be traced in all four poets, from native legends to one's own, from the myths of the tribe to the myths of the self. All are attempts to escape rational despair for a supra-rational transcendence, loneliness for a new kind of community. In a world where men do not stay put in the same place but travel away for work, for education, legends of lost place assume

a new importance; in an age when religious doubt has yielded to moral atrophy, the old myths assume a desperate significance. The most promising young poets have further mapped out these legends of space, myths of time. In Avebury, Richard Burns²⁹ traces the ancient 'stone in me/stone that I am', the past flowing out-through myth-into future. Clive Wilmer uses The Dwelling Place to trace, through legend, his own sureness of place and his uncertain debt to his father 'whom I hardly knew'³⁰, a genealogy of pain. Jeremy Hooker creates Solent Shore to structure his origins, his birthright, the patterns of water - 'I could spare a life trying to decipher them' - and the foreshore it ebbs away to reveal. Memories of far islands like 'shattered bone', legends retrieved by earlier 'Witnesses', tide back into the blood, that 'reddish fluid/where the water breaking fell'³¹. Myth singles out the reader³² from his static point in time and space - 'one's own body from its instant and heat' - to restore back to him eternity, the horizons, his own part in the schema of things.

If the destination is the same, the routes differ. Seamus Heaney has waded through bogland to a new harmony, 'the covenants of flesh'³³. Geoffrey Hill has escaped legend for a new kind of mystical Christianity, the dark mythologies of Tenebrae. Thom Gunn has progressed through the gospel according to Sartre, the epiphanies of LSD, back to a study of origins, myths for a sadder, harsher world. Ted Hughes, single-minded in his pursuit of the White Goddess, has survived the blackness of Crow for the luminosity of the Epilogue to Gaudete, hymns for a new world. Indeed, all four poets are myth-makers in the deepest, most difficult sense - those legends that govern art and society - reinvigorating Eliot's Waste Land (modern philosophical despair) with new ceremonies, an old reliance on Nature. The White Goddess - that cranky, infuriating, eccentric, half-mad study of poetic myth - looks to be increasingly important³⁴, bringing new life to the desert, signposts to the lost. Longing for the Goddess informs not only Gaudete but the 'deliberate kiss' of 'Glanmore Sonnets', the 'Angel of Tones' who musically resolves 'Tenebrae', the mourned dead of 'Breaking Ground', 'shee is found, shee is ever fair'³⁵. Whether this presages a retreat from technology back to the earth, materialism back to a worship of natural forces, is far beyond the scope of the present study. Certainly myth is an old changing way - ever the same, ever different - from which modern poets can still derive, as Eliot foresaw, 'a shape and a significance'³⁶, a means of escape, a coming to freedom.

Notes.

1. Michael Hamburger, 'A Jumble of Notes on Myth', Agenda 15, 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1977), p 14.
2. Peter Levi, 'Notes on Myth', Agenda 15, 2-3 (Autumn-Spring 1977) p 98.
3. Christopher Caudwell (pseud. for C. St. John Sprigg), Illusion and Reality: a study of the sources of poetry, London 1937, new ed. 1946, p 32.
4. Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, London 1967, 'On the mythological', p 138. The same collection includes excellent essays on myth as used by Edwin Muir, David Gascoyne, W.B. Yeats, Coleridge, Shelley and St. John Perse.
5. John Heath-Stubbs, 'Myth and Poetry', Agenda 15, 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1977) p 16-7.
6. Keith Sagar, The Art of Ted Hughes 2nd ed. 1978, p 193-4.
7. T.S. Eliot, 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar', Complete Poems and Plays, London 1969, p 40.
8. W.B. Yeats, 'Among School Children', Collected Poems, London 1950 (2nd ed) p 245.
9. David Gascoyne, Collected Poems, London 1965, p 45. Written during the 2nd World War, Romans recast as Nazis.
10. Kingsley Amis, 'The Voice of Authority', New Lines (ed. Robert Conquest), London 1956 p 45.
11. Donald Davie, 'Remembering the Thirties', New Lines, London 1956 p 71.
12. Peter Scupham, 'An Age', The Hinterland, Oxford 1977 p 22. Such impoverishment of the numinous, myth derided, has led, in one direction, to the use by willed undersophisticates - the Liverpudlian poets and their treatment of comic-book heroes - in the other direction to willed sophisticates like Craig Raine,

'the lonely God who made the cow
to fill his empty Eden first'.

(The Onion, Memory, Oxford 1978 p 23). For all his verbal brilliance, Raine exudes an unpleasant arrogance towards both subject and reader redolent of the defunct New Review, an arrogance impossible when poetry is genuinely subservient to myth. A sneer accords ill with a respect for earth rhythms, the non-verbal.
13. See, in particular, Life Studies London 1959, with poems like 'Waking in the Blue' being brutally open about the poet's spell in mental hospital.
14. Most notorious in this context is 'Lady Lazarus', Ariel, London 1965, p 16-9,

'One year in every ten/I manage it'.
15. George D. Painter, The Road to Sinodun, London 1951, p 76. Sinodun is a curious, possibly neolithic, domed hill on the south bank of the Thames, earlier celebrated by William Morris in News from Nowhere.
16. Basil Bunting, Briggflatts 1966, 2nd reset ed., p 38-9.

17. Nathaniel Tarn, Old Savage/Young City, London 1964, p 32.
18. Michael Horovitz, 'Afterwords', Children of Albion: poetry of the underground in Britain, Harmondsworth 1969, pp 316-77.
19. David Gascoyne, Night Thoughts, London 1956, p 48.
20. Roy Fisher, 'City', Collected Poems, London 1969, p 38.
21. J.G. Ballard, The Atrocity Exhibition, London 1970, p 120.
22. Thom Gunn, Moly, London 1971 p 43.
23. Edwin Muir, The Labyrinth, London 1949, p 61.
24. Hill was born and educated in Bromsgrove, ^{and, later, Oxford.} ~~in Warwickshire~~. On leaving Oxford, apart from a visiting lectureship at Michigan, he has taught at Leeds university.
25. See Gunn's autobiographical introduction to Thom Gunn: A Bibliography 1940-78, London 1979, compiled by J. Hagstrom and G. Bixby.
26. Jack Straw's Castle is a famous landmark in Hampstead, now the site of a pub.
27. See Alan, Bold, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, Edinburgh 1976, and Sylvia Flath, Letters Home, London 1976.
28. Susan Cooper, quoted by Neil Philip in his scintillating essay, 'The Function of Myth in Children's Literature', Tract 29/30.
29. Richard Burns, Avebury, London 1972, section (18).
30. Clive Wilmer, The Dwelling Place, Manchester 1972, p 9. The most startling poem in this fine, developing collection is 'Genealogy', tracing this debt to lost ancestors back through history.
31. Jeremy Hooker, Solent Shore, Manchester 1978, p 59. Just as Hooker's earlier conceptual work, Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant (London 1974) was based on the tension between chalk and flint, here the opposition is between dry land and water, reason and intellect, permanence and development; he desires synthesis.-
 'Gull on a post firm
 in the tideway - how I desire
 The gifts of both!' (p 60).
32. Ted Hughes, 'Six Young Men', The Hawk in the Rain, London 1957, p 55.
33. Seamus Heaney, 'Glanmore Sonnets X', Field Work, London 1979 p 42.
34. As in that useful barometer of intellectual fashion, the children's novel, most extraordinarily in the work of Alan Garner, equal in high seriousness to any of the poets discussed here. See in particular his two early novels The Weird-Stone of Brisingamen London 1960, and The Moon of Bomrath, London 1963.
35. Thom Gunn, Jack Straw's Castle, London 1976, p 77.
36. T.S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' (1923), reprinted in The Modern Tradition ed. Ellmann and Feidelson, New York 1965, pp 679-81. See chapter I, note 3.

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